

# American Film



Journal of the  
Film and  
Television Arts

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**Fitzgerald, Hollywood,  
and The Last Tycoon**



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Is there any more popular form of journalism today than the film review? Not very long ago, I was practicing it regularly myself. I received letters. Some of my correspondents made plain to let me know whether they thought I was right or wrong. (Wrong predominated.) But a surprising number of the letters came from high school and college students who asked my advice on how they could make a career of film reviewing. I'd assumed that with all the film courses available throughout the land, students would aim themselves at becoming directors, producers, screenwriters, editors, sound technicians, or whatever. But no, what they wanted to be was film critics. I wrote a piece called "The Film Critic as Superstar," taking note of this phenomenon. Soon after, I saw three more articles bearing the same title. I make claim to using it first.

No one, so far as I know, has ever counted up the number of reviews that appear coincidentally with the opening of a new film. An author of a book of any worth will consider himself lucky to get a half dozen notices, but *any* film will garner hundreds, probably thousands.

I think it was in 1962 that *McCalls* asked me to look into the reception of a production called *Cleopatra*, probably the most inadvertently publicized movie of all time. The prevailing assumption at the time was that the monstrously long film had been soundly thumped by the critics. Before ceasing my research I gathered together 751 reviews from all corners of the land. I graded them into favorable, mixed, and unfavorable. I discovered that 2.4 percent were mainly unfavorable, 1.8 percent were mixed, and the remainder were almost entirely favorable. Of course, the bulk of the unfavorable notices was localized in the New York City area. If I learned anything, it was that, by and large, reviews of almost any picture (with the possible exception of *At Long Last Love*) tend to be favorable, if New York City is eliminated from the count.

Most of those students who wrote me

appeared to want to be "New York-type critics"—that is, the type able to judge films with the necessary severity to make a name for themselves. Some of them sent me questionnaires to answer. One question ran: "Describe in 500 words or more the standards you use in criticizing a film." I was somewhat loathe to give away my standards, and, anyway, they seemed different for each film I used. What applied to Stanley Kubrick didn't have much to do with Ross Hunter. At any rate, I usually replied to the effect that good films were at least equally as valuable as good reviewers, and maybe they ought to think in that direction since the field was already somewhat overcrowded. Surely it remains so today.

Not only do we have every newspaper of any circulation reviewing any film which comes to town, but we have as part of our local TV news shows pretty much a standard item these days, a "movie review." Now *The New York Times* reviews not only movies each day, but plays, books, concerts, dance recitals, art exhibits, and even the latest restaurant menu. But TV reviewers (particularly the kind on at six in the evening) single out only movies for coverage. Why so? Perhaps for comic relief? Certainly the types I see on my tube seem less intent on giving me a considered review of a new film than on giving a performance. They wear funny goggles, breed odd-shaped mustaches and woolly hairdos; they crack limp jokes, make puns, and appear to have trouble reciting what they see on the idiot cards.

Their pronouncements are absolute. Said one: "*Barry Lyndon* is one long bore. Avoid it unless you need a sleeping pill." Having laid down the law, he wagged his mustache and wore a look of triumph as his visage vanished from the tube, never having vouchsafed what it was that was so boring. Another fellow I watched for a while seemed to take delight in announcing the arrival of every new porno film in town, leading me to suspect that the news program was less conscientiously intent on covering the

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## What? No Movie Reviews?

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movies than in providing some titillation as a sort of spice or seasoning.

This magazine decided to eschew the ordinary garden variety type of movie review because 1) there is no lack of such information and 2) because we think our editorial space can be better used. The review assumes that the reader has not seen the film in question, and it attempts to provide him or her with a service. But there is a distinction between a review and what might be called film criticism.

In film criticism, the writer is not attempting to meet a deadline, is not offering first impressions, and is not advising the reader on whether or not he ought to spend his money seeing something. He's attempting to dig beneath the surface, to emerge with insights, relevancies, parallels, comparisons, and explication. The clamor over a particular film, the dinner table discussions, have subsided. He writes in a cooler atmosphere and with a cooler head. He can discuss *Last Tango in Paris* in tranquility rather than in a headlong fever to declare it an imperishable masterpiece. We'd like to encourage film criticism, and whenever and wherever we find it we'll print it. By that time, no need to use quotations from it as advertising blurbs.

In the more than seventy-five years of film history, and some thirty years of television, there is much left to be discovered, including over half of the films made during that period. And not only discovered, but evaluated. Much of the results of research and scholarship have been appearing in books, and we feel it important to cover them. So we review books about film and television, and related fields of communication. Since the field is regarded as "specialized," the mass media pays little attention to such works. Here, at least, we can do our bit to redress the balance. It's not that we have anything against movie reviews (and there are those who have wondered), we're just not that kind of magazine.—H.A.

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# Letters

## Other Beginnings

There is a serious error of fact about the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures on page 4 of the October issue of *American Film*, as well as an implied slur, which I must correct in your pages.

Louise Brooks is quoted (in David Robinson's article) as saying that Will Hays "thoughtfully had set up the National Board of Review" in 1925 for his own nefarious purposes. The fact is that the Hays Office was founded in 1922 by the film industry; the National Board was established in 1909 by a civic-minded group originally associated with the People's Institute at Cooper Union in New York. From the start, the National Board has been firmly opposed to film censorship.

The statement quoted is not only untrue in itself but, by implying that we were a cat's-paw of the Hays Office, is demeaning to the many distinguished film critics, historians, and other eminent persons, associated with us. Those who are dead—such as Iris Barry, Otis Ferguson, James Shelley Hamilton, Mary Miller (Isabel Bolton), Richard Griffith, Dr. A. A. Brill, and Harry Alan Potamkin, to name only a few—cannot defend themselves. I speak on their behalf and for my present colleagues.

We have always been "opposed to legal censorship and in favor of the constructive method of selecting the better pictures," including (I must add) some of those in which the talented Louise Brooks appeared. One has only to read the National Board's leaflet, "45 Years of the Ten Best," to get an idea of the real nature of the Board's constructive work.

Quincy Howe

President

National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, Inc.

New York, New York

## Statistics Needed

Although we agree that Sam Grogg's article ("Where Do Film Teachers Come From") in the first issue of *American Film* was a highly informative and interesting one, we would like to disagree about his conclusions. Grogg stated that most of the individuals currently teaching film theory (aesthetics, history, criticism) come from "accidental origins" such as English, philosophy, history, etc. We found this statement to be misleading. While it is true that many people come from other areas, it is a generalization to say that this means *most*.

A survey of the UFA membership directory reveals that of the approximately 195 active members teaching cinema theory at a university or college, nearly 50 percent come from a TV and/or film production background. This is not to imply that these same individuals only instruct in motion picture theory. Many, of course, deal with the production aspects of the

art as well. This is not to imply that our figures are absolute—that they reflect the true situation. Obviously, a more complete survey may show that indeed there are more people from related fields now teaching cinema theory.

The point is this. Grogg has based his original conclusions, not on any kind of statistical evidence, but on general impressions he obtained at the CUNY Conference on "Film and the University" held this past summer. This impression, while valid for that *particular* gathering, may not hold true when considering the overall picture. There is every reason to assume the contrary to be just as valid—more and more schools are training students specifically in film theory.

Grogg's article has served a useful purpose. It has made us think about "where film teachers come from." It has made us realize that more evidence is needed before one can really answer that question.

Marion W. Weiss

Gene S. Weiss

University of Maryland

College Park, Maryland

## Publisher's Compliments

Have now read three issues of *American Film* and I want to convey my warmest compliments. Marvelous material, beautiful design, excellent balance—a first-rate job in every way. A publication, finally, that measures up to the medium.

As a publisher of film books my interest in *American Film* is more than casual. It's an important enterprise, and I'm delighted that it reflects such quality. Congratulations!

Len Karlin

President

Hopkinson and Blake, Publishers

New York, New York

## Wrong Man

I am writing in response to the December issue of *American Film*. A caption on page 17 incorrectly states that the actor who played Charles Darney to Ronald Colman's Sydney Carton in the 1935 version of *A Tale of Two Cities* is William Woods. The actor's correct name is Donald Woods.

Anne K. Leventhal

Washington, D.C.

You're right, and we apologize. —ED.

Director, The American Film Institute  
George Stevens, Jr.

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## London and Paris

David Robinson

### The Rival Capitals

Impolitely, the Nineteenth London Film Festival and the First Paris Film Festival opened on the same night. It may have been a gesture on Paris's part in defying the Federation Internationale des Associations des Producteurs de Film (FIAPF), which has arrogated to itself the responsibility for laying down regulations for the conduct of film festivals, requiring in return very substantial contributions from festivals which can often ill afford them; and for offering as its major service an annual schedule designed to avoid clashes of this kind. M. Deleau, director of the Paris Festival, who has also for some years past organized the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes, is known to have been one of the most energetic opponents of FIAPF in the past; and the clash of dates may not have been altogether accidental.

Paris is the newest, and potentially the strongest, contender in the growing competition to replace the defunct Venice Film Festival as the major autumn film event. London, like the growing collection of American festivals, is disqualified because of its essential function as a reprise of the best of the rest. Locarno, with more flair than money, does more to justify its own claim than Tehran, with a great deal of money but little sense of direction. The Paris Festival is organized in the cadre of the Paris Autumn Festival; and in addition to its main showings in the impressive, bizarre, and uncomfortable Theatre of the Palais du Chaillot, provided continuous side events (new French features, homages to the Italian cinema, to Pasolini, to Marcel l'Herbier, and so on) in a dozen other cinemas across the city.

It all had an unfortunately improvised and unready air. At the gala opening, attended by several generations of the greatest names of French cinema (to say nothing of Rex Harrison, Joseph Losey, and Roman Polanski), the stars stumbled around the rows for at least forty minutes trying to make sense of a system in which the hundreds of seats had name cards

## Festival Report

instead of numbers. Meanwhile, other absentee stars were demonstrating rather quietly outside the theater against the government's new system of replacing direct censorship by a system of financial impositions on films not precisely approved.

The actual festival program, too, had all the signs of being run up in a hurry. Compared with the London Festival's fifty entries from more than twenty countries, Paris seemed unbalanced with twenty-two films representing only eight countries, and no less than six of them from Italy. This large Italian entry was certainly not justified in terms of quality. There were Luigi Comencini's exploitation of juvenile erotic discovery in *Childhood*, *Vocation*, and *First Experience of Giacomo Casanova*, *Venetian* and Mario Morra's compilation of a decade of movie kitsch emanating from Cinecittà in the 1950s, *A Smile*, *a Slap*, and *a Kiss on the Mouth*.

The Italians, however, seemed most preoccupied with political history. Ennio Lorenzini's first feature film, *Quanto è Bello lu Morire Acciso* (*How Wonderful to Die Assassinated*) reconstructs a doomed rebellion against the Bourbons in 1857, using stunning images and a background of stirring popular revolutionary songs without generating any kind of dramatic dynamic. Francesco Maselli's first film for five years, *Il Sospetto*, has the ubiquitous Gian Maria Volonte as a clandestine Communist facing disillusion in the era of growing Stalinist influence. In *Down the Ancient Stairs* Mauro Bolognini finds a rather unsatisfactory metaphor for the Fascist regime in an ill-run madhouse with a medical superintendent (the equally ubiquitous Marcello Mastroianni) who is an erotomaniac schizophrenic. The Paris public admired much more the use of the madhouse metaphor in Milos Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

An Italian entry, nevertheless, provided the Paris Festival with its major coup, the world premier of *Salo*, or the

*120 Days of Sodom*, the final testament of Pier Paolo Pasolini, who had been murdered only a couple of weeks earlier. A notable Italian delegation, including Bernardo Bertolucci, Liliana Cavani, and Francesco Rosi came to Paris to honor the dead poet and to protest against the total ban imposed on *Salo* in Italy on the grounds that the public is "not yet mature enough" for the film. Antonioni, Fellini, Visconti, and Alberto Moravia supported the protest with telegrams.

On the day of his death Pasolini had told an interviewer, "The result is what I had intended and made. But now I see something in it for the first time. I feel uneasiness and fear." The film is certainly unlike any previous work by Pasolini. His story cycles—*Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Thousand and One Nights*—are relaxed in form and celebrate liberation and nostalgic joy in sexuality. *Salo* is a rigidly disciplined film which seems to express the profound and terrible despair which appeared to overtake Pasolini's last months. (He had published a series of powerful articles on the growth of social violence which he attributed to the consumer society and the disorientation of the urban proletariat.)

He took Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* as a metaphor for our own times, though he set it in the last days of the Second World War, in *Salo*, the puppet Fascist republic which provided Mussolini's final stronghold. The Fascist era, with its monstrous inhumanity, provided possibilities for the sort of absolute power over other human beings which Sade imagined. Pasolini sees it as a larger symbol of power in general and "the natural capacity of power to turn human bodies into objects."

The film is composed in four movements. In the anti-Inferno, Sade's four libertines—the Duke, the Bishop, the President, and the Chief Magistrate (clearly SS men and Fascist functionaries in the Pasolini reading)—organize a roundup of the victims or collaborators for their orgiastic experiment: eight virginal youths and eight maidens, four whores, four well-appointed studs, four young soldiers, and four storytellers.

Sade's monstrous old women, whose task is to inflame the imaginations of the libertines, are now transformed into elegant, bourgeois matrons in sequined gowns. While one of them provides a melodious accompaniment on a grand piano,



the other three conduct the company through their stories into the successive circles of the Sade-Pasolini Inferno. In the Circle of Passions, sexuality is shown with a cold and arbitrary violence. As they devise new sexual atrocities to inflict, the libertines constantly change the rules, with the capriciousness of totalitarianism, to trap their victims into new penalties and punishments. In the Circle of Shit, the graceful Signora Maggi (Elsa de Georgi) expatiates on the delights of coprophilia as the masters gorge on an excremental feast. The final Circle of Blood, with tortures and murders which directly recall the Nazi massacre of the Italian village of Marzabotto, concludes with a strange little epilogue in which two of the young soldiers innocently dance together.

The film is perhaps unique in the total refusal to seduce the audience. The single object is to produce a powerful, cathartic shock. The sexuality, the scatology, the horror produce no titillation, only pain; and that is the object of this dark, Swiftian film.

The London Festival produced no such shocks for its audiences in its very comprehensive roundup of world cinema. The offense of Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, which was included in the U.S. entry as a result of pressure by a group of London critics, is not at all the same thing. Sometimes London choices look like a matter of duty rather than of actual choice; for instance, the heavy-handed and heavyweight panorama of Algerian history from 1939 to 1945, Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina's *Chronicle of the Years of Embers* or Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce - 1080 Bruxelles, Chantal Anne Akerman's conscientious saga of a woman in crisis which seems as interminable as its title.

West Germany dominated the festival, while Rainer Werner Fassbinder was the undisputed star director, with three new feature films, all released within the space of six months and all showing him very near the top of his form. In *Fox*, Fassbinder himself plays the hero, a rough, young homosexual who works the fairgrounds as "Fox the Talking Head" until his showman friend is sent to prison. Fox thereupon forcibly borrows the price of a lottery ticket and wins half a million. The money, rather than his person, attracts the attention of the young heir to a failing

family business. He has his well-bred family systematically take Fox for every penny, and then kick him out to die alone and bewildered. Fassbinder shows that they have taken much more than the money, however. In making Fox emotionally dependent, they have robbed him of the defensive brutality of his class and upbringing. The homosexual milieu—vividly and accurately depicted—gives added force to the parable about political and erotic exploitation.

Fassbinder is evidently fascinated by the school of left-wing, almost "underground," films about proletarian subjects that emerged in Germany around 1930. Fox's more formal name in the film is Franz Biberkopf, the name of the main character—an honest worker exploited by a gang of criminals—in Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin-Alexanderplatz*, which was adapted to the screen by Piel Jutzi. There is another tribute to Jutzi, this time to his most famous film, *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929) in the title of Fassbinder's *Mutter Küsters Fahrt zum Himmel* (*Mother Küster's Trip to Heaven*). Frau Küster is the victim of a much more subtle system of exploitation than Frau Krausen, who simply foundered under the weight of Depression poverty. Played by Brigitte Mira (the old lady in *Fear Eats the Soul—Ali*), Frau Küster is a wife and mother in contemporary industrial Germany. One day her husband runs amok in his factory, kills one of the bosses, and commits suicide. The attentions of the sensational press break up the family, leaving Frau Küster alone, broken, and confused. She first turns for help to a couple of well-heeled Communists; and when she dis-

covers too late that she is simply being exploited as a handy political martyr, flees to an anarchist group, only to find herself being made the figurehead of a terrorist attack.

Rather curiously the film was shown in versions with quite different endings in Paris and in London. The Paris ending was the same as the original version shown in the Berlin Young Film Forum in July. A roller title describes how Frau Küster is shot by the police while being involved in the kidnapping of some journalist hostages. For the London version Fassbinder had devised a happy solution. Neither end gave any satisfaction to Fassbinder's left-wing admirers, who in any event had always been dubious about his political conformism. Fassbinder does not in fact accept easy political allegiances, and here admits to the heretical view that the Left can have its villains, errors, and exploiters of the proletariat as well as the Right.

Brigitte Mira plays a very different, uncharacteristically unsympathetic role as a loathsome, managing mother-in-law in Fassbinder's *Angst von der Angst* (*Fear of Fear*), a new episode in Fassbinder's continuing panoramic portrait of the contemporary German working-class family. All the familiar figures are there: the sisters, brothers, and in-laws, the servile husbands and overcherished children, the meannesses, the pathetic little gestures of infidelity. Fassbinder uses most of his usual repertory company, with Margit Carstensen in the main role as the wife who feels her grip going, fears insanity, and claws on such doubtful handholds as sleeping with the lecherous corner chemist. *Continued on page 71*



Marcello Mastroianni as the erotomaniac schizophrenic in Mauro Bolognini's *Down the Ancient Stairs*



# McMurtry on the Movies

## Personal Factors

### Larry McMurtry

Novels ripen slowly, often at some remove from the turmoil of human emotion. In many cases the novelists who write them are not alive to see them attain their true maturity. Buried like tubers, they await the dormant appetites of posterity.

Not so screenplays—as the pages leave one's typewriter they go straight into an atmosphere not unlike that of a fish market. Those that aren't eaten at once will probably rot within a day or two and be disposed of. Thus, it seems to me, the writer who decides to do screenwork should envision himself from the outset in the Balzacian or Dickensian mode—a man too large to boggle at details, rushing his sheets off to the printer with reckless abandon. If the public doesn't buy *Little Nell*, then kill her off. If the public adores *Little Nell*, kill her off anyway—it will be all the more effective. If Jack Nicholson isn't available to play Lucien Chardon this year, why, scotch *Lost Illusions* and do *Eugenie Grandet*. The role might interest Streisand.

I think it is safe to say that the tight-assed Flaubertian writer, with a commitment to the *mot juste*, will not adapt well to screenwork—a form in which no *mots* and few concepts are sacrosanct. Such a person, used to dealing only with the contours of his own psyche or the intricacies of his own prose will likely be driven mad by the kind of happenstance that occurs all the time in screenwork. Per-

sonal accident, executive whim, or simple limitations of time and money can combine to shatter even the most crystalline concept.

In the final draft of *The Last Picture Show*, for instance, Peter Bogdanovich and I developed a fairly decent “idea”—a little novelistic, perhaps, but potentially effective on the screen. The “idea” had to do with the Anarene High School's song. Early in the movie we would show Duane and Sonny, still best friends, coming out of basketball practice. They have just been dressed down by the coach, but are in high and irreverent good spirits anyway. Jaci is waiting for them in her black Ford convertible—they leap in and all three race off for the drive-in. As they tear through the bleak streets of Anarene, a mood of youthful rebellion prompts them to sing the school song, loudly and as cornily as possible. *They* are not going to be controlled by any coach, or by any premise, either. Mainly, the race through the streets would sing with camaraderie: three kids happy in one another's company.

This camaraderie, of course, will be shattered as soon as Jaci makes it impossible for Sonny to repress his interest in her. The senior year, just beginning at this point, wanes; they graduate; the rivalry flares up; Sonny and Duane fight; Duane joins the army; and, in no time it seems, football season has come again, and Sonny finds himself on the sidelines at a football game, carrying the chain which is used to measure first downs. Preliminary to the kickoff, the high school band plays the school song. Aching with memory, though not quite sure what it is he is remembering, Sonny quietly breaks up. Is it

that ride through the streets, when they made such fun of the same song? Or is it just the lost friend, the lost girl, or the lost life—the life that he had when he was still in high school and was one of the team?

In any case, it seemed to me the two scenes would serve as tragicomic echoes of one another, adding one more bittersweet tone to the mood of loss that pervades the end of the picture. Peter agreed, and the scene in the car was shot. By the time it was shot things were at sixes and sevens on the movie set, and one of the principals in the scene, Timothy Bottoms, seemed to have developed a visceral dislike for the other two principals—Cybill Shepherd and Jeff Bridges—on the grounds that neither of them was Dalton Trumbo. Yet the scene worked, catching something of the lightness, adolescent gaiety, and warmth which was needed to make its echo, at the end of the movie, all the more bittersweet.

Eventually, editing time came. The scene in the car survived into the rough cut, which proved to be something like twenty-six minutes too long—the producer in this case being quite desirous of a two-hour movie. Long before the film had been pared down to two hours the little scene had to make way for more immediately pertinent material; and the scene at the end, when the band plays the school song, though effective in itself, echoes nothing specific.

It is worth noting, in passing, that a movie set is a place where a great many people can be found who are apt to be at sixes and sevens with one another at any given time. Personal confusion is sure to be rife, and however professional the people may be, the interplay of their affections and



Illustrations by Ken Rinciari



hostilities will sometimes have an effect upon the tone of given scenes, or even of whole pictures. The published logbooks of movies as different as *Cleopatra* and *Brewster McCloud* make this clear, but it is not a factor that has received much serious attention.

Consider a relatively simple set like that of *The Last Picture Show*. The cast and crew—thirty or so volatile people—were housed together for a couple of months in a motel in Wichita Falls, Texas, just on the edge of the Oklahoma breaks. Naturally, given that circumstance—the common circumstance of location malaise—nothing stayed the same. The Bogdanoviches, besides having to make the movie, were coping with both birth and death. Polly bore their second child just before the filming started, and Peter's father died not long after it got under way.

The cast and crew, meanwhile, did what casts and crews always seem to do when on location, i.e., wiled away their free time with songfests, pot parties, drinking, and improbable involvements. The location romance is an all but universal feature of movie life, but not, somehow, of movie literature. This reticence stems, I suspect, from the reaction which soon sets in once all parties get back home—it is in most cases only humane to try and pretend that such things didn't happen, a pretense helped along by the sense that almost nothing which happens on a location seems quite real. This results, I think, from the fact that movie work entails the juxtaposition of intense work pressures with stultifying boredom. Once the work has been going on long enough for fatigue to have everyone in its grip, then the whole crew begins to participate in a kind of social illusion or hallucination, i.e., that they have become a family. In fact, the link is temporary, and the result of commercial accident; all they may really have in common is proximity and fatigue.

In such an atmosphere, love looms—partly because it's a distraction, but mostly because, if it would only occur, it would cut the loneliness. Sometimes it does occur, of course, as it did this time, between Peter Bogdanovich and Cybill Sheperd. Venus scorns easy targets, as all well know, and in this case found

one sufficiently difficult for everyone.

A situation soon existed not unlike that which prevailed in the Oblonsky household at the beginning of *Anna Karenina*. No one involved could believe that things could go on more than another day or two without the world cracking open—and yet a production schedule existed and had to be met. It was met, more or less; it always is, more or less; and it would be fascinating work for some scholar to attempt to correlate the production schedules of a few great movies with the progress and decline of the location romances which are usually running concurrently with them. These romances certainly can affect the texture of the pictures being made, but the results are by no means always negative. Directors often capitalize on just such accidents of personality.

What is probably even more common is for the personal factor to assert itself in the early or developmental stages of a project, causing it to be either delayed or aborted. I have been involved with several near-misses, but with none more tantalizing than the original Western which Peter and I conceived about a year after *The Last Picture Show* was released.

The working title for this movie was "Palo Duro"—the name of a sizable canyon in northwest Texas. The picture was conceived and written with three actors in mind, those being John Wayne, James Stewart, and Henry Fonda. It was to be an end-of-

the-West Western, about three old men who had partnered and buddied together for thirty or forty years during the heyday of an era. Partly out of an unwillingness to sit passively and let decrepitude take them, they set out with a motley crew, which was to have included Ben Johnson, Cybill Sheperd, the Clancy Brothers, and a student of mine named Ernest W. Speed, Jr., on a last adventure—an attempt to steal a herd of horses from the Comanches. Along their route they pick up a widow for whom Stewart and Fonda have long competed (unsuccessfully), and her child, who, if things had gone smoothly, might well have been Tatum O'Neal.

The theme we were pursuing was roughly that of "Sailing to Byzantium." The best don't exactly lack all conviction, but they have, to say the least, lost a good deal of their zip. The center—Wayne, naturally—more or less holds, but in such an oblique, spiritual way that neither the character, nor the actor himself, perceived any triumph in it. Generally and obviously, things fall apart. They get the herd, but then Stewart, the poet of the group, acting quixotically, decides the herd should have its freedom and runs it off. In an attempt to stop this, the loyal old wrangler (Ben Johnson) is trampled and killed, and the gallant young wrangler (Ernest W. Speed, Jr.) disappears into Comancheland.

The remainder straggle back home, where Fonda is promptly arrested for the (accidental) shooting of

*Continued on page 73*





Fitzgerald,  
Hollywood,  
and

# THE LAST TYCOON

Hollis Alpert

What price the auteur theory, with its elevation of the director to prime mover in the cinematic scheme of things, when it is a producer who has the dream and then spends years making it a reality? With all due respect to Truffaut, Sarris, and others who have focused on the undeniable importance of the director's function, the problem of a film's authorship is too complex to allow for a single theoretical unraveling. As a case in point, let us take *The Last Tycoon*, still being filmed at this writing. The tightly closed set was briefly unlocked for a few days to allow some exploration by a couple of intrepid reporters, one of whom happened to be me. "Oh," said a friend of mine, a *Time* staffer, when I told him of the unusual privilege granted me by the producer, Sam Spiegel, "you'll have a scoop."

Well, scoop or no, I did wander through Fitzgerald-Spiegel-Pinter-Kazan-land on the Paramount Pictures lot, saw the golden head of Siva come floating down a flooded drainage ditch, with Kathleen and Edna perched on the idol's head-dress, paid a visit to Monroe Stahr's modern (for

the thirties) office of chrome and molded wood, with a large picture of Minna on the windowsill, walked through Kathleen's little bungalow, where Stahr met at last the golden-haired English girl he had first glimpsed during that night of earthquake and flood, and then I ran into a publicist who invited me to visit *his* domain, the set of *Marathon Man*, also on the lot, and being produced by a man (Robert Evans) who had once played Irving Thalberg, the prototype for the last tycoon, in a movie made by Universal, where Thalberg had his tycoonish beginnings.

To paraphrase Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem, irony of ironies, all is irony! At least in Hollywood. F. Scott Fitzgerald, in his last, sodden, illness-tormented years, wished nothing more than to have his name standing alone among the credits on a picture for the authorship of a screenplay. His name appeared on the screen only once, and then it was for a shared credit on *Three Comrades*.

Now Fitzgerald's name will be up there, bold and clear, as author of an unfinished work, re-





*F. Scott Fitzgerald, as he looked when he returned to Hollywood in 1937.*



Pictorial Parade

*Left: Robert DeNiro as Monroe Stahr, Ingrid Boulting as Kathleen, in the forthcoming film version of The Last Tycoon.*

garded even in its partial shape as classic, fashioned for the screen by as prestigious a group as any author, no matter how important, could wish for. Sam Spiegel, laden with Academy Awards, as producer; the vaunted Harold Pinter as screenwriter; the noted Elia Kazan as director; and a cast which includes Robert DeNiro as Monroe Stahr, Robert Mitchum as Brady, Jeanne Moreau as an actress, and, in somewhat lesser roles, Jack Nicholson, Tony Curtis, Ray Milland, and Dana Andrews.

Visit a dressing room, and you'll find a copy of *The Last Tycoon*. In another, the Pat Hobby stories, or *Beloved Infidel*, Sheilah Graham's recollections of days and nights spent with Fitzgerald. I noted, too, on a shelf, Aaron Latham's *Crazy Sundays*, a study of Fitzgerald's Hollywood period, and, coming up on the ABC network, a press release informed me that very day, was a two-hour special called "Fitzgerald in Hollywood." It was almost as though Fitzgerald's time of failure (for so he regarded it) was being elevated to more importance than his early period when he was, without question, the golden boy of American fiction.

"Poor son of a bitch," Dorothy Parker said, in front of his casket in 1940, echoing what Owl Eyes had said when Gatsby died, and little knowing how the pathetic failure would rise phoenix-like from his grave to join a select company of American immortals. The books he wrote are already outnumbered by the books about him. His works remain in print, selling better now than they did in his lifetime. *The Great Gatsby* has been brought to the screen three times, never well; *Tender is the Night* has been made, badly; and now it's *The Last Tycoon*'s turn, and what does Sam Spiegel hope to do with it?

Spiegel temporarily inhabits a suite of small offices in a row building at Paramount. The phone on his desk never rings; instead, one of a row of buttons lights up, and he regards it speculatively, as if deciding whether or not to answer. Instead, he lights a cigar, leans back, and tells you about his picture. Make no mistake. It's Spiegel's picture. Auteur theory be damned. A new one will have to be invented: the Spiegelian Theory of Filmmaking.

"I want this to be a distinguished picture," he said. "I want this picture to be unlike most movies





Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills

*Norma Shearer and Irving Thalberg, in 1928, when she was at the height of her stardom, and he was Hollywood's top genius.*



*Robert DeNiro in a tycoonish moment. Behind him is the actual intercom used by a Paramount executive in the late thirties.*

that are being made today...."

"What's Spiegel like?" a friend asked me, afterward. I try to answer. I've met him several times over the years. He's seventy-three now, and yet he has changed little, if at all. He's a bit on the heavy side, but he always was. He has an accent, and it's the same accent I knew before. Yet he speaks with precision, always searching for the right word, a little annoyed and dissatisfied until he finds it. "He has charm," I say vaguely, "and a way of knowing what's in your head. Say something he likes to hear, and he glows, almost boyishly. He can be kindly or very tough, and when he's tough it comes across with regret and purposeful indignation." I gave up. Sam Spiegel is Sam Spiegel, an immutable force.

"I want this picture," Spiegel continues, "to revert to that classical concept of movies which will attract audiences who have been alienated from theaters—from movie theaters—by violence. This picture has drama, but not melodrama. There is violence of temperament rather than violence of fists. Rather than a plot, there is a theme to this

picture. No, there is both theme *and* plot. One without the other wouldn't mean anything. I really hope it will be a picture that will bring back audiences who haven't been to the movies in many years."

Sam Spiegel can afford not to make pictures, so it can be said that he's doing this one for fun, and for love. Not that he doesn't want it to make money. Perish that thought. A good producer produces successes, and he has more than enough to his credit: *The African Queen*, *On the Waterfront*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, to mention only a few. He's had to wait three years for *The Last Tycoon* to get before the cameras. Another producer might have gotten something else into the works, but not Sam. This is the one he wanted to do.

"Why?"

"Before this Hollywood wave of nostalgia began," he said, "I wanted to do a story about Hollywood as I had known it, to recapture the sense of what it was. I would walk onto a lot and see the emptiness, stages used for television series and

commercials, if they were used at all, and I wanted to see them alive again. So I began making notes, putting down memories, notions for a story, and nothing jelled. I must have filled a few hundred pages, and I knew it wouldn't work. Then it struck me that *The Last Tycoon* had already said it, and said it well. As it turned out, the rights were available. They had reverted some ten years ago to Fitzgerald's daughter, Mrs. Frances Fitzgerald Smith. Lester Cowan and MGM had owned them for a time, and it had gotten as far as an Irwin Shaw script. I didn't read that script, because I knew I didn't want to do a Lester Cowan kind of picture. Others had been after the rights, but Mrs. Smith had very jealously guarded them and refused to part with them. When I approached her, she flattered me by saying that I was the only man she would let have the rights. That flattery was accompanied by a very exorbitant demand for money. But, why not?"

Once he had the rights, Spiegel needed a director and screenwriter. He sent the book to a few directors he thought would be suitable for the project. Mike Nichols was interested; so, as it turned out, was Elia Kazan, who wrote him saying that *The Last Tycoon* was the one assignment that would turn him from novel-writing back to directing. Spiegel sent him the book. Meanwhile, negotiations with Nichols had proceeded to the signing point, and, as part of the deal, Buck Henry (whom Nichols preferred to work with) would write the screenplay. Kazan was hurt and indignant.

But Buck Henry dawdled. He had other things to do first. Months went by, and finally Spiegel notified Nichols that another screenwriter would have to be found. Spiegel called Harold Pinter in London. Pinter hadn't read *The Last Tycoon*; in fact, he had read very little Fitzgerald. But he promised a quick answer. The answer took two days to arrive at Spiegel's yacht harbored in the south of France. Not only would Pinter be happy to do the script, but he would put aside all other work until it was finished.

Spiegel had Pinter meet him in California. They spent three weeks there together. The time was mostly spent with Spiegel showing Pinter Hollywood as he had experienced it and had known it. He toured him through the MGM lot, using a guide who had been at the studio—as a guide—for forty years. "One day," the guide told them, "Greta Garbo came up to me and said she had seen me often and that she knew how much the studio meant to me. I cried." The guide broke into tears again. Pinter made a note to include the moment in the script. It's there.

"Let me mull awhile," Pinter told Spiegel, as he was about to leave for London, "and then we'll see what I come up with." Six weeks later he notified Spiegel that he had a complete first draft. "That draft," Spiegel said, "is essentially the construction of the film as we're doing it now. There have been changes, many changes; more than a year of changes. In fact, very early on, Mike Nichols was

ready to proceed with it, but I felt it needed more work."

With the script close to being in shape, it was time to begin casting. "The Monroe Stahr part," Spiegel said, "was simple. There were three names, and we could pick one of the three. The fourth doesn't exist. Now you must remember that Pinter doesn't exactly write an orthodox script. There are no technical directions, or directions for actors. The nearest thing to a direction is the word, 'pause'. The script is full of those 'pauses'. Even Kazan, when he came on the project, was puzzled by this, until he got to know Pinter and his methods. Harold does it deliberately. He wants the director and the actor to add their own creativity, their own cadenzas. He, in fact, forces them to do this."

The three names were Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino, and Robert DeNiro. No doubt the fourth name does exist somewhere, but it isn't a star. An odd thing is that Spiegel simply won't admit that the Monroe Stahr character is based on Irving Thalberg, yet Hoffman, Pacino, and DeNiro all bear at least a mild resemblance to the fabled figure. Is it, perhaps, that Spiegel sees a little of himself in Stahr?

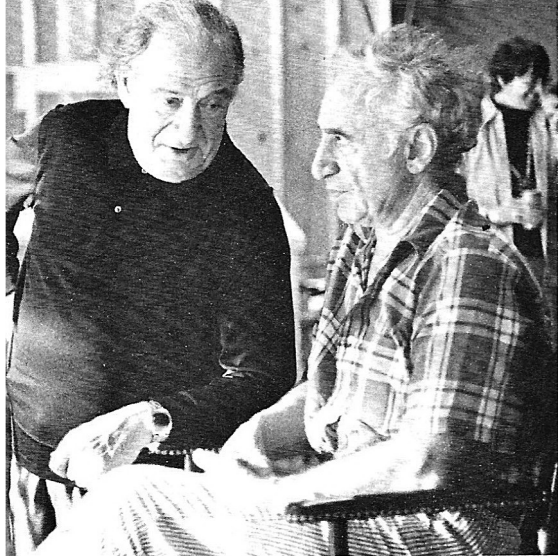
The Pinter script was sent to all three. Pacino never answered. Spiegel sent another, a slightly more refined version. Still no answer. Spiegel asked a friend who knew Pacino to call him. An associate of Pacino's finally called to say that the script wasn't right for the actor. "Thank you," said Spiegel. "At least you had the decency to call up and let me know."

Dustin Hoffman did call. He wanted to talk about the part, but he was busy producing a play on Broadway, and, until opening night came and went, he was not in a position to read anything properly. Then there was the *Lenny* premiere, and Dustin was too tired to talk and wanted to head for London, from where he would send his observations on the script. "I received the observations," Spiegel said, "through an actor friend of his, and was somewhat offended, but held my peace. In London, Dustin's agent called Pinter, and gave him a kind of royal command: 'Would you please come to see Mr. Hoffman at Grosvenor House at such and such a time?' Pinter sent him a wire to the effect not precisely to jump in the Serpentine but that he was unable to accommodate him.

"Robert DeNiro, on the other hand, answered immediately, saying he would be delighted to do the picture, but he had two months to go to finish Bertolucci's *1900* in Italy. So I waited, not two months but six months. But he had also arranged with Mike Nichols to start *Bogart Slept Here*, a Neil Simon comedy, as soon as *1900* was finished. That took precedence over my deal with him. So, a picture that was to start in the spring now had to be postponed until October, and it wouldn't have started then if *Bogart Slept Here* had not been canceled."

There has been much gossip in Hollywood about





*Sam Spiegel and Elia Kazan between takes at Paramount during the filming of The Last Tycoon.*

that cancellation. Spiegel's version is that DeNiro, the superb actor he is, was not suited for Neil Simon's comedy, that Simon felt the casting was wrong, and that Nichols by now was dubious about the script. "Anyway," Spiegel said, "everyone seemed pleased to stop the picture after two weeks of shooting."

But then there was another bombshell for Spiegel. Mike Nichols decided, regretfully, that he did not want to direct *The Last Tycoon* after all. "I don't know," Spiegel said. "Perhaps he was nervous, or wanted to get out of film directing for a while. But that left me with a script, a cast, but no director. I went back to Kazan, shamefaced, I suppose, but putting on my best mien, so to speak. I told him, truthfully, the whole story, and said, 'I'd love you to do it. Forgive me, but I feel at this point you'd be the right person to do it.' He was really very, very generous about it. Kazan is basically a very generous human being. He wasn't always that way. But in recent years he has mellowed enormously." Spiegel smiled, a bit mischievously. "Maybe it's the therapy of writing his novels that has mellowed him. One inevitably has ups and downs in any relationship, but after the first flare of misunderstanding, or resentment, there is always an attempt on his part, or on mine, to see the other fellow's point of view. We have never had a serious misunderstanding on this picture, only some minor ones."

Spiegel held up a thick folder which had been lying on his desk. It was filled with memos from Kazan, he said. Kazan was a compulsive typist of notes to him. "You have never seen so many notes, pages and pages of them. He wakes up at some ungodly hour and types notes to me."

The week before my visit, there was night location shooting on Mulholland Drive, which happens to be on the top of the mountain that looks down on Beverly Hills on the one side, and the Valley on the other. Even in balmy Southern California, it gets cold up there at night. Heated trailers for the three actors involved in the scene had been provided for comfort between takes. But no trailer had been provided for Kazan. "He wrote me a letter in the morning," Spiegel said, "as if I were the dispenser of trailers." Spiegel began reading the letter with

impish amusement.

"Dear Sam," it began, "I want some personal advice from you, friend to friend. It's about my feet and a certain psychological problem I have...." The problem had to do with cold feet during night shooting on location, perhaps the most difficult kind of all. There they were, wrote Kazan, somewhere out in the high reaches of this faceless city, attempting to conquer technical problems that took the crew a long time to handle. Kazan had long waits between each shot, and had nowhere to sit down, no shelter from the cold, no place to study the script. Robert DeNiro had a nice bungalow on wheels, and Angelica Huston and Ingrid Boultong even nicer ones. The property people had a large truck with heaters and refreshments on hand. Kazan felt that all deserved these excellent accommodations, but that there was a neglect of the director of the picture involved. Could something be done in the future?

"The letter goes on for three typewritten pages," Spiegel said. "All he had to do was say in advance he wanted a trailer, and he would have gotten a trailer. But someone forgot to tell the production manager. But this enormously talented man loves to be babied, as I guess we all do. I must tell you, I was touched by it. I called him immediately and said I would personally see to it that he got all the trailers he desired, and that I was taking the matter up with the production manager. He said, 'Do me a favor and destroy that letter. I'm ashamed I wrote it.' I said, 'No, that letter is the perfect illumination of our relationship. I'll never destroy it, because it's really beautiful to know that we are all children at heart, and we like to have parental care, friends' care, someone above all to complain to—a wailing wall to go and wail before.'"

Spiegel's own company, Horizon Pictures, had done the preliminary financing of *The Last Tycoon*, and he had first arranged to shoot it at the MGM studios, using, for the films within the film, some old MGM movies. "MGM was an empty studio at the time, and I wanted an empty studio. But by the time the oral deal was to be reduced to contract, MGM abolished its distribution, and their films were to be distributed by United Artists. Well, I don't need two distributors getting wealthy on a picture; I prefer to have some of it for myself. Paramount immediately came in and offered me a better arrangement."

There was one important casting area that had been left to the last. Who was to play Monroe Stahr's love object, Kathleen? Here is how we meet her in the novel, and more or less as we will meet her in the film:

One of the women came sliding smoothly down the cheek of the idol, and Robby caught and set her on solid ground.... Robby turned to Stahr for judgment.

"What will we do with them, chief?"

Stahr did not answer. Smiling faintly at him from

not four feet away was the face of his dead wife, identical even to the expression. Across the four feet of moonlight, the eyes he knew looked back at him, a curl blew a little on a familiar forehead; the smile lingered, changed a little according to pattern; the lips parted—the same.... The river passed him in a rush, the great spotlights swooped and blinked—and then he heard another voice speak that was not Minna's voice.

"We're sorry," said the voice. "We followed the truck in through a gate."

Not only would the actress chosen play Kathleen, but also the dead Minna, in scenes of her film. The daughter of producer Roy Boulting, Ingrid,

(her stepmother is a young woman her own age, Hayley Mills) had heard about the production of *The Last Tycoon*, and spent close to two years applying for the part. She first contacted, in Rome, where she was modeling, the then head of production for Paramount, Robert Evans, telling him she thought she was right for the part. He suggested she see Sam Spiegel. In New York, again modeling, and studying acting—she had done a few film parts in England—she contacted Spiegel, who thought she was too young for Kathleen, even though she was the same age. "But I *am* Kathleen," she told him. Spiegel agreed to test her.

"I was searching and searching for the right girl," Spiegel said. "And I still hadn't found her by

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## Hollywood Daze

Back in the early days of that esteemed publication, *The New Yorker*, its editor, Harold Ross, had a phobia against fiction that dealt with the problems, whether literary or human, of writers. Readers, he pronounced, perhaps meaning himself primarily, were simply not interested in the trials and tribulations of literary folk, and he extended this basic principle to almost any type of artistic worker. He would reject an otherwise commendable story on the grounds that it was "writer-conscious."

Television, in the case of F. Scott Fitzgerald, has not taken the same tack. A couple of years ago, the ABC network ran a two-hour special titled "F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Last of the Belles." Fitzgerald was played gloomily by Richard Chamberlain, and his wife, Zelda, was played even more dourly by Blythe Danner. But the show was rescued by a Fitzgerald story within the story, and, once it got into the author's fiction, it was on safe, satisfying ground.

ABC has another two-hour special about Fitzgerald on hand, produced by the same team of Herbert Brodtkin and Robert Berger, written by the same dramatist, James Costigan, and titled "F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood." Fitzgerald, this time, is played (gloomily) by Jason Miller, Zelda by Tuesday Weld, and that beloved infidel, Sheilah Graham, by Julia Foster. It was not a happy time for Fitzgerald, and it is not a happy two hours.

While Fitzgerald imbued much of his fiction with his own experience, he was generally careful not to create characters who were writers. Now and then he allowed one to hang around the periphery of a story, but the major people were in some other line of endeavor. True enough, those last Pat Hobby stories dealt with a screenwriter, but Hobby was an old hack, strictly a dealer in schlock, in no way to be considered an artist. What may have entranced Fitzgerald when it came to creating Monroe Stahr on the model of Thalberg was that the Stahr-types wielded power, made things happen, exercised brilliance, without even writing a word.

At any rate, Fitzgerald as a figure for biographical drama is something of a bore. There doesn't seem to be any way to make him work—as the film made from *Beloved Infidel* also proved. In his Hollywood phase he appears as a broken-down novelist hanging on for his literal life in a milieu for which he was simply not suited. He came there first in 1927, was silly enough to take a screen test, tried some idiotic pranks with Zelda, and quickly left.

The TV story shows us something of this, then brings him back ten years later; Zelda is now in a sanatorium and given to bible study, while Sheilah Graham provides plump arms for his shelter. Always waiting to get him back in its grip is that disease, alcoholism. Alcoholics, unfortunately, are bores, too. So are demented women. Put together a long scene involving a writer leaving the wagon while visiting an insane wife, and you have all the

elements necessary for changing channels.

The mistake, if there is one, has to do with assuming that the personality of an important writer is as important as his work. Fitzgerald left behind the best of himself, his fiction; and since it appears to be perfectly proper to attempt to capture the elements of his fiction in motion picture terms, there is little to quarrel about there. The artist in Fitzgerald knew how to create captivating people. He may have drawn from life, but he knew, magically, how to make the changes. Fitzgerald's Hollywood years aren't fiction, they are mostly gossip, no matter who tells it—Aaron Latham in *Crazy Sundays*, or Sheilah Graham in *Beloved Infidel*.

As it happens, Fitzgerald did leave behind one last finished work. Lester Cowan had commissioned him to adapt *Babylon Revisited*, but lost interest before the screenplay was finished. (The short story was later reworked in a glossy, overblown Elizabeth Taylor vehicle called *The Last Time I Saw Paris*.) Fitzgerald finished the script anyway, regarding it as his best screenwork. The rights to it now belong to the producers-writers Richard Levinson and William Link. Fitzgerald admirers both, they had hoped to film the script exactly, and let it stand as a last memorial to the author. They couldn't get the financing. They thought of doing it at less cost as a TV special. Here, too, the powers that be said no. Better by far, it would seem, to view Fitzgerald in the form of his last screenplay than in the inglorious show called "F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood."—H.A.



From the shooting script of  
*The Last Tycoon*, by Harold Pinter 46

64. Contd.

STAHR  
 I made a silly mistake. I thought  
 you were wearing the silver belt.

KATHLEEN  
 Oh. Well, I wasn't.

STAHR  
 No. But it was you I wanted to  
 see.

KATHLEEN  
 Yes? Why?

STAHR  
 You reminded me of someone.

Pause.

KATHLEEN  
 So you're Mr. Stahr, the producer?  
 I suppose the girls are all after you  
 to put them on the screen.

STAHR  
 They've given up.

KATHLEEN  
 You didn't want to put me in pictures?

STAHR  
 No.

KATHLEEN  
 Good. I'm not an actress.

Pause.

STAHR  
 I feel as if I had my foot in the  
 door --- like a collector.

She smiles.

From *The Last Tycoon* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

She searched his face. She thought, like everyone, that he seemed tired—then she forgot it at the impression he gave of a brazier out of doors on a cool night.

"I suppose the girls are all after you to put them on the screen."

"They've given up," he said.

This was an understatement—they were all there, he knew, just over his threshold, but they had been there so long that their clamoring voices were no more than the sound of traffic in the street. But his position remained more than royal: A king could make only one queen; Stahr, at least so they supposed, could make many.

"I'm thinking that it would turn you into a cynic," she said. "You didn't want to put me in the pictures?"

"No."

"That's good. I'm no actress. Once in London a man came up to me in the Carlton and asked me to make a test, but I thought awhile and finally I didn't go."

They had been standing nearly motionless, as if in a moment he would leave and she would go in. Stahr laughed suddenly.

"I feel as if I had my foot in the door—like a collector."

She laughed, too.

the time Gadge Kazan came on. I tested Ingrid Boultong twice—Gadge doing improvisations with her—and then took the tests to London to show Pinter. I wanted a consensus before making any decision. Harold was shocked when he saw the tests. 'Can't you find an actress?' he said. 'She couldn't get into rep in England.' But she looked right, and sounded right, and we cast Ingrid. I daresay Pinter is now eating his words. Worst comes to worst, you can cut together a performance, but in Ingrid's case we don't have to."

Time has begun to grow short; Kazan wants to see Spiegel about that night's shooting. The golden head of Siva had not stayed on its underwater track, and Kathleen and Edna have nearly been thrown off into the studio tank. Can he look at the rushes and see what is usable?

Spiegel, though, took a moment to reminisce. The mood of the film, the late thirties, reminded him of the time he came to Hollywood, and he wanted it understood that they were not telling a romantic, unreal story.

"It was unquestionably," he said, "a more romantic, more glamorous time. In those days, I was impoverished, but I used to give New Year's Eve parties here. They were famous. A thousand people came. Charlie Chaplin came, and Hedda Hopper, and they were ready to kill one another. Bogey came, and Gable, and Howard Hughes. All Hollywood was at my house at 702 Crescent Drive on New Year's Eve. It was a corner house, and on New Year's Eve the pool was covered with a dance

floor, and over it was a huge tent. People came and went from ten in the evening until seven in the morning. The stars would arrive and sweep in, like royalty.

"This New Year's I gave another party, not at the same house, but a rented one in Truesdale, the newer section of Beverly Hills. Kazan was there, so was Willy Wyler, and Billy Wilder. They all used to come to my parties. We talked about the former days, and we all agreed that the quality of people then was different. Not better, but considerably more glamorous. Today a star doesn't sweep in, he crawls. They come with disheveled hair and dirty hands and no ties. It was a black-tie affair. The young moviemakers who were invited came the same way. It would be condescension to put on a dinner jacket, and a concession to a life-style they don't believe in. Without sounding too pretentious about it, I think people were more civilized then, had more breeding and grace—yes, grace—and it's a quality that has gradually disappeared from the film scene. Those days people had it, some superficially, some substantially. Who in the hell really cares today?"

Buttons on his telephone were blinking. He sighed, and shrugged. Back to today, and what to do about the golden head of Siva. I noticed he was not wearing a tie himself, but it seemed to me clear why he was so immersed in the making of *The Last Tycoon*. ■

Hollis Alpert is editor of *American Film*.

# MARCH



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The glass on a television set is a lens,  
and it exaggerates the faults and  
virtues in the recital of daily events.

# The Theater of News

Philip Hilts

When newspapers were first printed daily, they cost a penny, and they delivered Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Ned Ward. But, with these famous exceptions, most of the newspapermen were cheap-thrill artists—bringing for the first time the titillation of quick news and hot politics into the parlor—and they were often condemned for it. Charles Leslie was used to a more lofty literature, and once damned even Defoe for aiming his writing down to the common rabble. He said:

“The greatest part of the people do not read books; most of them cannot read at all, but they will gather about one who can read, and listen to an *Observer* or *Review* (as I have seen them myself in the streets). . . .”

They *listened* to the newspaper, said Leslie. Those first anchormen who read the penny papers to the gathered rabble had brought to them an amount and quality of information that only the most wealthy men had gotten previously.

Walter Cronkite now reads to the gathered rabble. Families gather at home, crowds gather around televisions in neighborhood bars, and together they watch it all: the men on the moon, the soldiers slogging across paddies or loping down the main streets of half a dozen burning cities, the president quitting the Oval Office.

The common man is brought for-

ward to a place at the front, a seat at the edge of history. In the live events covered by television, the clash of ideas and the eruption of events are felt and shared more personally than was ever possible by newspaper accounts. Indeed, television carries a view of events denied even to most of those actually present.

But those live events that television covers are only flashes of illumination that come a few times a year at most. They are a few frozen moments that light up politics and history as a strobe light would. There are darker gaps between the bright, live flashes of television; the candle power offered by the networks to illuminate the daily events is much smaller. The prime offering is the evening news, a twenty-two-minute snippet put on the air at an hour when the audience is small, distracted by dinner, and heavily weighted toward the fringe—the oldest and the youngest viewers. Though the evening news is the most important fare on television most nights, it is not in prime time. That begins at eight o'clock.

But still, the evening news delivers, as did the penny sheets, news that the people just would not get otherwise. With the exception of a few well-served cities, Americans generally are offered little information from their newspapers about national and international economics, politics, social issues, or science.

The “issues of the day,” covered competitively by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, suffer lack of exposure in standard American journalism. The average American daily newspaper is strong on local news, special features (comics, horoscopes, advice), and celebrities. The evening news does not follow the standard of *The National Enquirer* (America’s largest-selling newspaper) or *The Chicago Tribune* (a more or less typical provincial paper, largely unfettered by news). The evening news follows the higher standard of *The Times*.

Television news is our only truly national journalism, and people now depend on it. There are moments for even the most information-saturated people in America for whom television’s quick coverage of events is important. There was such a moment for Lyndon Johnson.

It was less than an hour after John F. Kennedy had been shot; he was not yet dead. Vice-President Johnson hurried to Love Airfield to board the president’s jet and leave immediately if necessary. His information about the day’s events was unclear, conflicting, and in scraps. It was still possible, in Johnson’s imagination, to conceive a massive conspiracy. . . . There could be incidents elsewhere in the country. . . . Dallas could be surrounded. . . . When Johnson stepped on board Air Force One, he heard Walter Cronkite’s voice coming from

the stateroom television. He walked straight for it.

Johnson sat down in front of the television, and his eyes fixed on the screen. He drank glass after glass of water in the hot cabin, and he continued to stare at Cronkite, who was clocking off the facts. "Johnson was hoping that Walter Cronkite would tell him what was going on," says William Manchester in *The Death of a President*. "If Dallas had been surrounded, the New York studios of CBS would have been a lot likelier to know of it than anyone within shout-

ing distance of the Vice-President....But Dallas was not invested. The networks knew nothing that Johnson did not know. He turned away, relieved...."

Television news grew up from those newspapers of eighteenth-century London, and the two incarnations of journalism share many traits. They also suffer the same criticisms. The newspapers of London were widely found to be inadequate and "unfortunately ephemeral." This journalism seemed of no lasting value. The news came and passed so

*"Nine hundred Spaniards have been killed...." The latest news of the Spanish-American War is watched by a crowd outside the Tribune Building on old New York's Newspaper Row.*

The Bettman Archive





**Television news is our only truly national journalism, and people now depend on it.**

quickly, and the writers merely stamped out their stories without reflection or imagination. The criticism that papers were ephemeral had hit a soft mark, and it sunk in deep. Newspapers were still getting the same criticism in 1891, when Oscar Wilde put it neatly: "The difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read."

In recent years, the targets have shifted a little. Now, those accused are mostly tabloid writers and TV newsmen. The sin is the same—shallowness.

A few other faults in those penny papers of the 1700s will also sound familiar: The papers thrived on conflict and sensationalism. Their news came mostly from the same government and foreign sources, usually unnamed. There were only a few writers who made money, half a dozen by Steele's account, and those few made huge incomes while the rest were paid poorly. The newspapers seemed to be either messenger boys for the government, or nearly ready to bomb the government chambers. The papers were jammed full of tales of catastrophes, crimes, and politics, but dealt with little else.

The virtues of the early papers were much the same as of papers today. They delivered the news and in ways in which the people were interested. Noted Richard Steele: "We writers of diurnals are nearer in our styles to that of common talk than any other writers."

For the reporter, the work of journalism has not changed much either. The reporter of the eighteenth century found his profession dangerous. John Tutchin of the *Observator*, for example, was taken in the street and nearly beaten to death on account of one political story he wrote. The same poor fellow was also sued for libel once and imprisoned twice. Editor Tom Brown was forced to end the publication of his newspaper at the point of a rival's sword. George Ridpath, editor of the *Flying Post*, fled

the country when charges were brought against him. The author of the *Post-Boy* was arrested and jailed by the government. Jonathan Swift decided not to go out of the house at night for fear of giving his opponents a good opportunity. He and nearly all other reporters cautiously left their works unsigned.

**T**he reporters of those papers were not only subject to hazards, but also to privileges, including a tax-free income and movement among the highest persons and issues of society. For those with the necessary boldness and courage, it was altogether an exciting business. Carrying the traffic of ideas between the powerful and the not-powerful is a job that has since earned some refinement, but not much. There is still the constant attention paid to royalty, and there are still the occasional beatings.

Consider the career of Richard Valeriani, NBC's diplomatic correspondent, who in recent years has traveled hundreds of thousands of miles with Henry Kissinger and his court. In the early years of his career, Valeriani covered Cuba and was arrested five times.

He once evaded arrest for several weeks. The secret police invaded his apartment, cut the phone lines, then left. He found refuge in a vacant apartment at first, then later fled to the Italian Embassy, where the ambassador was friendly to him. It was night, and when Valeriani arrived, the ambassador came down to the door in his pajamas and told him, "I know why you're here." The embassy was already crowded with refugees. After a week, the police were still after him, and he went to the American Embassy. When he decided to leave, he went back to his apartment with a Swiss diplomat. The diplomat was to protect him by saying that Valeriani was in his cus-

tody; their routine was carefully rehearsed. But they had been at his apartment only a few minutes when the police arrived and announced he was under arrest. The Swiss diplomat said nothing, and Valeriani was carried off.

A few years later, Valeriani was covering a civil rights demonstration in Alabama. The local people, angered by the presence of network television, sprayed black paint over the camera lens. When Valeriani continued to report, one of the men took an ax handle and with a hefty swing smashed it across Valeriani's skull. An Alabama state trooper saw the incident and disarmed the ax-wielder. But he did not arrest him. Valeriani was bleeding, and the trooper told him no doctors were there. Valeriani asked the trooper to call an ambulance, but the trooper refused and left. When Valeriani finally got to a hospital, his head was shaved and stitched up. He then broadcast his report from the hospital bed.

Reporters still pay as much homage to royalty as did the journal writers of the 1700s; they will go far to report the smallest royal doings. NBC's reporter Ray Scherer was once in the gang of reporters who followed President Eisenhower like a school of cleaner-fish. Eisenhower was vacationing in Colorado once. One day at two in the afternoon reporters were told that former President Herbert Hoover was about to visit Eisenhower for a fish fry.

Panic! The news was to go on at 7:45 in the evening, and the nearest point from which reporters could process their film and send out their stories was eighty miles away, in Denver. The CBS and NBC reporters each calculated the amount of time necessary to make it. They each decided it would be a very close race, and only the greatest speed could beat the clock and the competition.

The correspondents waited for Eisenhower and Hoover to come out and stand by the open fire. They

*"The greatest part of the people," Charles Leslie wrote, "cannot read at all, but they will gather about one who can read, and listen. . . ."*

waited for the fish to be dropped in the pan—that's all they wanted—the president and former president chatting. Then they took off.

Scherer was going to be the cleverer of the two correspondents. He would not get a car and speed down the uncertain roads at ninety miles an hour. He decided he could rent a plane and fly with the crows straight and quickly to Denver. There was only one film processing lab in the city which could do the job; Scherer would be able to get his film out first and to get on the air. CBS might not even make it.

When he got to the airfield, Scherer looked with some chagrin at the plane he had hired. It was very old and beat up, with open cockpits for pilot and passenger. Then he saw the pilot. The man was hobbling very slowly toward the plane and Scherer. He moved at an excruciating pace on two artificial feet. The man could barely walk, but was ready to fly Scherer to Denver.

They took off, and it was only a few minutes later that Scherer realized the discomfort of the open cockpit. He wore only light slacks and a sport shirt, and the air got colder and colder around him. He warmed himself the best he could and hung on as the plane sputtered toward Denver. But when they arrived at the planned airport, his footless pilot did not seem up to the job of landing. He went in close once, then pulled back on the stick and flew around the field. He circled again, but this huge airport intimidated him, and he gave up. He flew off away from the field.

Scherer and the pilot finally coaxed the plane down at another airfield. But at least Scherer had reached the ground. The reporter jumped out of the airplane, then looked around the field. There was a small shack, and the empty field. He had no way to get to the city, he thought in a sweat, until he noticed a milk truck parked behind the shack. It was loaded down with milk, and its driver was reluctant to take this raving reporter any-



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where. But a twenty-five-dollar bribe soon had the engine going and Scherer heading into the city. He arrived at the lab, beat and frenzied, but found that the CBS crew had made it a few minutes earlier. He had to sit and wait till the lab processed the CBS film first.

By the time the NBC film was souped and dried, there was no time even to look at it. Scherer simply grabbed it and sped to the local studio. The film was racked up just in time for John Cameron Swayze in New York to introduce in his deep and formal voice Ray Scherer in Denver. The viewers were treated to some bad film of two men standing by a fire, and a narration by Scherer which was something less than serious. Suddenly the film ended, and Scherer, sitting casually in the studio in his sportshirt, was on the air. He quickly finished reading his script, and the program switched back to an embarrassed Swayze, who muttered something about the crazy getups reporters wear.

Scherer's ordeal was nearly over, but he had rented his footless pilot and aging plane for a round trip. So he went back to the field and climbed aboard. The plane was cranked up. It rolled down the runway, coughed, and died. It would not start again, and Scherer whispered his thanks to God as he got out and began looking for a car to rent for the ride back.

CBS's Dan Rather has chatted

with presidents and has been beaten to the floor at the National Democratic Convention in Chicago. John Chancellor has shared private company with Lyndon Johnson, and has been carried off a convention floor by the sergeant-at-arms. Daniel Schorr was imprisoned in Moscow, berated by President Kennedy, investigated by the FBI, and called a killer by a CIA chief.

The job, with its hazards and slavishness to politics, continues much as it was when Swift reported.

Gay Talese, in describing the life at *The New York Times*, outlined the job as it was and is: "News, if unreported, has no impact. It might as well not have happened at all. Thus, the journalist is the important ally of the ambitious; he is a lamplighter for the stars. He is invited to parties, is courted and complimented, has easy access to unlisted telephone numbers and to many levels of life. He may send to America a provocative story of poverty in Africa, of tribal threats and turmoil—and then may go for a swim in the ambassador's pool. A journalist will sometimes mistakenly assume that it is his charm, not his usefulness that gains such privilege; but most journalists are realistic men not fooled by the game. They use as well as they are used. Still they are restless. Their work, instantly published, is almost instantly forgotten."

Although the craft of journalism itself has changed little in two



**"The New York Times writes stories which are short.  
The tabloid New York News writes them even  
shorter. Television news writes them on pinheads."**

hundred years, the frame in which the writers' pieces are set has.

The newspaper of 1950 carried the same sort of stories and features as the newspaper of 1750 (right down to the ads and advice columns), but the two are quite different because printing presses have changed. The 1750 paper was very narrow and long—only a column or two of type. It was only a few pages, and its circulation had to be small, because the printers could only work slowly with the hand presses. The 1950 paper, by comparison, was a glittering, snappy grab bag of stories and features laid out like a box of chocolates—many delights in each broad and wide page. The 1750 reader would have been dazzled. The variety of type faces and the photographs would have made him gape.

**T**he change between 1750 and 1950 was technological, not journalistic. Then, beginning about 1950, another technological metamorphosis began to occur. From the gray newspaper caterpillar emerged the airy, colorful butterfly of television. Again, more a change in form than in substance.

Journalism looks at the world through a Coke bottle. Things are greenish and bent. The proportions of objects change. Chairs have huge legs and small seats; people's faces grow thin as their noses balloon. These are the formal refractions of the trade. Stories are covered by certain formulas, certain rules of fairness and expediency, not according to how they should look to the eye.

There was a press conference called in Washington in 1974, and the subject was the one-dollar loaf of bread. Those who called the conference said it would happen, and blamed the government and the "middle men" who push up prices. Newspapers, wire services, and television covered the story, then carried it. No one present *believed* that there

would be a one-dollar loaf; everyone was aware that this was simply theater. But it had to be covered. The reporters dutifully added to their stories the disclaimers by the Department of Agriculture. The whole package was neatly bound up according to the rules, but it had as much substance as steam in a high wind.

Daily journalism, in practice, is superficial even when it is executed perfectly. Anyone who knows a subject thoroughly, or a man intimately, has experienced the sense of disorientation in reading about that subject, that man. "But, but....!" He begins, but can go no further. How do you straighten out the bent, green world of the Coke bottle? How do you tell someone where that image fails in its likeness to the world?

Consider this fragment:

The headline read: "GIs, in Pincer Move, Kill 128 in Daylong Battle." The story read: "American troops caught a North Vietnamese force in a pincer movement on the central coastal plain yesterday, killing 128 enemy soldiers in day-long fighting. Two American soldiers were killed and 10 wounded, according to an American spokesman. The fighting erupted six miles northeast of Quang Ngai in an area of sand dunes and scrub brush between Highway 1 and the South China Sea...."

That was *The New York Times*, the model of models, reporting on the My Lai action. It is a story that followed the rules set by journalism in giving a report of a real event in a real world.

Similar rules allowed *The New York News* to display the story of the Attica prison rebellion under the headline: "I Saw Seven Throats Cut." No throats were cut; the hostages were not even killed by inmates. The hostages were killed by police bullets.

Even in accurate stories there is a distortion. There is too little time, too little space, and the journalist must err on the side of caution and the authorities. Those are the rules.

They mean that daily journalism is really a formal version of gossip. What a reporter hears he passes on, subject to the formalities.

Television news, operating under the same rules, adds the handicap that it is the shortest of all forms of daily journalism. *The New York Times* writes stories which are short, the tabloid *New York News* writes them even shorter. Television news writes them on pinheads.

The glass on a television set is a lens, and the faults of newspaper journalism are exaggerated in it. Readers may have found the newspapers of the eighteenth century "unfortunately ephemeral," and the tales in *The New York Times* may pass so quickly that they are soon just yellow paper dirtied with ink. But the news on television evaporates still faster. It disappears instantly. Some researchers asked people what they remembered of the evening news immediately after they watched it, and most remembered nothing.

**S**entences that seem awkward or hard to understand in print are wholly lost on television. Deadline pressures which are unnerving in newspaper work are still more rigid and impossible in television. A newspaper may be hours late if necessary, but television may not be thirty seconds late.

These TV magnifications are terrible flaws, mentioned often by critics. But there is some magnification which is important, exciting, valuable. There is the power of evocation. One TV producer overstated it simply: "How many times would *The New York Times* have to tell about a Marine going into a hooch and lighting it with a Zippo? But put it on television, and it's the beginning of the end of the Vietnam War!"

There is one story related about a Vietnamese soldier who had been

through many years of battle, and who had seen as much violence as any veteran. But he watched some stories of the Tet offensive on television. He wept. He had not grasped it fully before, he said.

Another incident from that time, that war. In words it is only another event, but here is the cable description of that famous incident sent from an NBC crew in Saigon to NBC in New York:

"Troops went into the An Quang Pagoda, seat of the Buddhist militance, and tried to clean out the Viet Cong who had taken it over. This story is competitive. CBS and ABC were there but we are the only ones who have film of the execution.... A VC officer was captured, the troops beat him, they bring him to Gen. Loan, who is head of the South Vietnamese National Police. Loan pulls out his pistol, fires at the head of the VC, the VC falls, zoom on his head, blood spraying out. If he (the cameraman) has it all, it is startling stuff. If he has part of it, it's still more than anyone else has."

The film of that was so strong that John Chancellor and executive producer Robert Northshield cut it down again and again, each time taking out more of the twitching body, the spurting blood. Still, it was a very disturbing piece of film.

This gulf between the evocation of the word and the evocation of the flickering image was a gulf terribly misunderstood by officials who conducted the war from Washington. They discovered their error as one discovers an open, unexpected manhole in the street—with a black rush and a thump. The officials read the cables from Saigon during the Tet siege. The North Vietnamese lost huge numbers of troops, and did not gain much ground. The cables "presented a reassuring and bloodless picture snapped from the lofty perspective of high headquarters," Don Oberdorfer reported afterward. Washington read only the facts of troops, bodies, and acres, and was

heartened that the offensive had failed. They were sure the American public would be just as pleased and reassured at the strength of our side.

But the public watched television. The public watched the violence, the panicky fighting even in Saigon, and the disarray of the South's opposition. These young boys in black pajamas, who were supposed to be weak and getting weaker, managed to mount an offensive that struck Saigon and frightened their enemy. The public reacted with anger and disbelief, directed at Washington.

**T**here is another magnification the lens of the television accomplishes, even beyond the evocation. It is authority.

There is an authority that comes with the formality of news delivered on television; and that authority is purposely enhanced and exaggerated further by the theatrical illusions TV producers and anchormen use on the air. We know that researchers have asked, and have found again and again, that people believe TV news more readily than other forms of journalism. Could they think otherwise? The integrity of the news rests on the integrity of the anchorman, and who would disbelieve Walter Cronkite? The newspaper men are not even faces, only names in small ink. Nothing more. But Cronkite has blue eyes and the demeanor of an honest man.

But there are tricks of the stage used to enhance even this first trick of the stage. Cronkite does not deliver the news in an offhand manner, does not tell stories as he would privately. He orates.

Listen for a moment to one who works at Cronkite's elbow every day, editor Tom Phillips. He recalled one afternoon when the signs of economic darkness were rolling up on the horizon; he and CBS economic writer Mary Earle chose the several

stories of the day that were strong omens. They wrote and edited them. Cronkite, as is his habit, went carefully over them with his own pencil.

Both writers were aware of the implications of the stories. But then Cronkite was on the air; he sat in a bright circle of light surrounded by the dark of the newsroom. His voice was deep, his tone firm and serious. He rolled the items off one by one with a gathering emphasis.

Phillips felt the impact for the first time. He felt a little chill of belief. When Cronkite was finished he turned to Mary Earle and muttered, "Wow!" He says now, "I guess we didn't believe it ourselves until we heard him say it. There is that actor's quality he has, he hits the words *just right*. He makes you believe."

There are other stage illusions: He doesn't just come on the air and talk. The anchorman is announced, as if he were a dignitary entering a formal reception. He does not look anything but perfectly dressed and coiffed. Cronkite, in fact, has been named one of the ten best dressed men in America.

When journalism moves from the newspaper page to the TV screen, it moves from a literary frame to the theatrical. Literary conventions and illusions are exchanged for theatrical ones. Each carries a few virtues and faults unique to itself.

But what has been little understood by critics and journalists themselves is that they share a heritage. The change in forms has left television and print journalism still very much alike, and very much like daily journalism has been since the beginning. ■

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This is the first of a two-part article on television's coverage of news.

Philip Hilts was a reporter for *The Washington Daily News* before its demise. He is the author of *Behavior Mod* and a forthcoming book on TV news commentators titled *The Evening Stars*.



# PARADE'S END

## The Past in Movies

### Michael Wood

Movies have an uncompromising specificity about them, which is none the less powerful for being so familiar. "About this time an ambitious young reporter arrived..." A novelist can write this and let the matter go, but a moviemaker would have to endow the same reporter with sex, race, features, voice, clothes, manners; would have to make a series of particular, conspicuous choices. A historian can write, "Churchill spent Christmas in Ottawa," but a film would have to show us Churchill's face and suit and cigar in a material city. It is because the physical, photographed world of movies is so specific that movies are such good preservers of the past. They are perfect, animated picture albums, where dates are precisely determined by the length of skirts and the cut of jackets. A forgotten gesture, seen in a movie, will plunge us back into lost time with the speed of Proust's madeleine; and next to this wealth of immediate texture and visible context, novelists and historians often seem to confront the past like paupers, able to fish up only a few bits of period slang and scant lists of public, political events.

But there is a price. Movies preserve the past so well for us by preserving what is, for them, the present. When they try to go back into the past themselves, to create ancient Rome, or old England, or an earlier America, their specificity weighs heavily on them, and the clinging present seems almost impossible to shake off. I'm not thinking simply of Hollywood's grand, unconscious anachronisms, like the dialogue in virtually every biblical epic, or the marvelous moment in Michael Curtiz's *Francis of Assisi*, where an unmistakable twentieth-century football player, thinly disguised as a medieval knight, drops a mailed hand on the hero's shoulder and says, "Francis Bernadoni, you're unner arrest."

There are subtler persistences of the present



All photos: Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills



tense. There is Anne Baxter, for example, in *The Ten Commandments*, dressed impeccably as an Egyptian princess and acting fairly well, but remaining nevertheless as irretrievably American as Roy Rogers. Or there is Jane Fonda, in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* complete with a thirties' hairdo and makeup and clothes, but still carrying a marked flavor of the late sixties. Of course, we have seen Baxter and Fonda in too many other movies, have watched them too often in contemporary outfits and settings, to believe in these transmutations. But there is also the fact that *being* Anne Baxter or Jane Fonda means carrying all kinds of traces of your time. You are a famous visual representation of a fifties or a sixties woman, partly a reflection of your age, and partly an agent of what it looks like—in any case, a distillation of a prevailing style, which is something subtler and more insidious than a way of dressing or even a way of talking. The whole person, when recorded as completely and minutely as film records it, is historically dated.

No amount of authentic detail is going to cancel this effect, although many moviemakers have been tireless in their quest for such detail. What the detail does, when properly used, is to evoke, rather than represent, an old period. Frock coats, whisks; fireplaces, candelabra; pony carts, old cars; spats, furs—these things become signs of pastness rather than real pieces of the past. Henry Fonda with a funny nose in *Young Mr. Lincoln* doesn't look like Lincoln, he merely signals "Lincoln" to us; signals John Ford's intention to have Fonda play Lincoln. The actors and actresses in such movies either embody the present—Anne Baxter at war with her princess costume—or they slither off into a no-man's-time, which is neither the specific *now* nor the general *then* but a sort of tamed present, the present with its harsher, clearer edges knocked off. W. C. Fields, in *David Copperfield*, converts his already old-fashioned delivery into a gesture toward the nineteenth century, a way of moving toward Dickens while remaining exactly where he is. In *Gone With the Wind* Clark Gable's stiff, amiable, anonymous manners take him out of the present without really putting him in the past. All this means is that time in movies is usually felt to be either the present, or something that is simply *not* the present, a vague pantomime of periods and places; a *not-now* which includes the time of most adaptations of literary classics, many biographies, nearly all Westerns, and all historical romances.

I have been thinking so far of American movies, and of older ones at that, and I should perhaps try to make a few distinctions. The past in European movies tends to appear either as patriotic legend or

*Julie Christie as she appears in The Go-Between. "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there."*



as sumptuous imitation of a vanishing culture. The second option has been heavily exercised lately, with Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* and Joseph Losey's *The Go-Between* as prime examples. (I think Losey must be counted as a European moviemaker by now.) Losey is supposed to be making a version of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, and Bernardo Bertolucci has finished a film called *1900*.

What these films have in common is an interest in the end of the old century and in the beginning of the new one, a curiosity about the way the old world died and we ourselves came into our inheritance of modernity and complication. They can best be understood, I think, by means of the sentence from L. P. Hartley's novel which is heard on the sound track at the beginning of Losey's *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." The suggestion is that the past can still be visited, but that it can't be fully understood. What is perhaps most remarkable about this sentence is the faint note of surprise it contains, its mild astonishment that the past is not still *our* country, that we can no longer speak its language. This is a perfectly nostalgic sentiment. We can't do anything with the past except record its pastness in loving detail and pile on the agony of our estrangement from where we were.

The past in American movies is both less real and more malleable. Indeed, in the films of the past ten years or so, the past has become more and more of a bazaar, a place to plunder for funny costumes, queer cars, and meaningful metaphors. What *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, and *Day of the Locust* have in common (to take a handful of American-made movies more or less at random), is a period setting combined with a complete indifference to that period as a historical moment in its own right. They share, that is, a lack of interest in the past as the past, and this is quite different from simply failing to shake off the present, as I have suggested so many movies do.

**T**he Depression in *Bonnie and Clyde* provides a visual manner keyed for us during the credits by a series of photographs recalling those of Walker Evans in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*: a few old cars, some clothes, and a general apology for cheerful anarchy. The Indians in *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* are pretexts for a sermon about contemporary race relations; and Hollywood in *Day of the Locust* is merely a last gradient in the decline of the West. The specific, historically correct details in all these movies only accentuate this impression. The past has been raided rather than reproduced. And the only convincing alternative relation to the past which we seem able to propose now is parody—movies which mimic movies, like *The Long Goodbye*, *Chinatown*, and *Farewell, My Lovely*.

I don't mean to complain about this (it wouldn't do much good, since I assume we get the movies we deserve), but I do want to suggest that we find ourselves in a remarkable spot: We make movie after movie with their faces turned toward the past, and yet the past seems more inaccessible than ever. This is not nostalgia in the European sense, not luxurious mourning for what won't come back. It is a series of failed attempts to make the past work, fruits of a baffled desire to "repeat the past," in Jay Gatsby's phrase.

"He talked a lot about the past," Fitzgerald's narrator says of Gatsby, "and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps...If he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was...." This comment follows Gatsby's famous outburst when told that you can't repeat the past. ("Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!") At first sight it seems odd that after this, *The Great Gatsby* should end on a picture of its hero as a man who believed in the future, but future and past do meet up in Gatsby's dreams, and this is a treatment of time which is very common in American movies too. The future will be created by repeating the past, by going over the past and getting it right. The future will be the past *rewritten*, opened up and used again. And since Gatsby, for all his energy, was wrong, and this can't be done in reality, it has to be done in myth, in a wishful framing of the past for present and future purposes.

We return, in so many movies, to a certain starting place, so that the general *not-now* becomes a local *not-yet*. The frontier is not yet closed, the towns have not yet grown up in the wilderness; the Civil War has been and gone, but the War's real rift has not yet taken place, Northerners and Southerners meet up in Mexico or in the West and respect each other. *Wuthering Heights*, in its movie version, has its emotional center in the moment when Heathcliff has not yet gone away and Cathy has not yet married Edgar Linton. Biographies, like those of Freud and Pasteur and Juárez, invariably begin by showing us famous men who are not yet famous. *Young Mr. Lincoln*, predictably enough, is about a Lincoln who was not yet the older Mr. Lincoln. The list could be continued indefinitely.

The past in older American movies is a time of possibility, a time when the inevitable has not yet happened, when indeed it doesn't necessarily seem inevitable at all. Sometimes the inevitable is magically averted; sometimes it arrives but is seen to turn out for the best; sometimes it is genuinely distressing and unalterable, but then a pause is made before its consequences come crashing down on us. Whichever way a movie treats the past, the general strategy, I think, is the same. It is Gatsby's strategy, a return to a starting place, an attempt to recover something, some idea of ourselves. We want to repeat the past in the sense that we want to go back to the point where the road turned, and look at the landscape again.



"There aren't any times but new times." Anne Baxter, Joseph Cotton, Dolores Costello, Agnes Moorehead in *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

"Don't wake the Tarkington ghosts," Fitzgerald wrote in one of his notes for *The Last Tycoon*. Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* not only wakes those ghosts, it puts them on parade, and the result is one of the most complicated of American explorations of the past. "In that town, in those times...." Welles's narration begins, and the signs of the times are clothes (Joseph Cotton trying on a series of coats and boots in a long mirror, a sartorial version of leaves falling from a calendar), houses (rich, cluttered interiors of the Amberson mansion, which from the outside looks very similar to the houses which appear in Vincente Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis* and in George Stevens's *Giant*; a house hovering between the good old days and some sort of Gothic threat), and the invention of the automobile. There is a remarkable dissolve fairly late in the film which brings cars and houses together by turning a street

"In Hello, Dolly! the past lives as a brave mockery of the present." Walter Matthau, Barbra Streisand.



of not so grand dwellings into a factory. Change and industrialization occur at the wave of a cinematographer's wand. The result is not flashy, but eerie, since it suggests that we gave away our old towns just as easily as that, befouled them and darkened their skies, as Welles's voice says in the sound track, with the speed and recklessness of an image changing on a screen.

Yet it is Eugene Morgan, the inventor of an automobile, sign and instrument of all this change, who remarks that cars, "with all their speed forward," may be a step backward in civilization. Not that this stops Morgan from going ahead with his cars, and it was Morgan who earlier in the movie had sharply brushed aside all nostalgia. Just like old times, someone says to him, when he returns to the Amberson house after eighteen years. "There aren't any old times," he says. "When times are gone, they're not old, they're dead. There aren't any times but new times." Morgan's new world will wreck the Amberson's old world, which is a good thing, because it will break up caste and horrible snobbery, and a bad thing, because it will bring with it befouled cities and darkened skies. The *not-yet* of the movie is perfectly represented by a visit to Morgan's plant. At first sight it looks like a blacksmith's forge. Then, as the camera prowls about, it is revealed as an automobile factory. In a matter of moments, an emblem of the old world has changed into an emblem of the new, and without a dissolve this time, simply by means of an increase in our range of vision.

The psychology of *The Magnificent Ambersons* is rudimentary. The arrogant Amberson son who won't let his mother marry the man she loves, the lover's final forgiveness of the son, the son's final comeuppance in a hard world—these are Tarkington ghosts who could well have been left to sleep. But the sense of historical change as tangled and relentless, of the passing of personal time and the time of the city, of the intransigence of desire and the uselessness of hindsight, makes *The Magnificent Ambersons* a remarkable movie. In one sense, it is close to Losey's *The Go-Between*, a pause in the past. In another sense, it is miles away, as far away as *not-yet* always is from *just-too-late*. Even if they are separated only by days or minutes, the difference is crucial, as anyone knows who has nearly missed a train, and then actually missed one.

Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis* is a good companion piece to *The Magnificent Ambersons*, since it conjures up the same turn-of-the-century America: old houses, large families, pretty daughters, awkward suitors; balls and parties; the Middle West (Welles's film is set in a changing Indianapolis, Minnelli's in St. Louis in 1904, the year of the World's Fair). It is a time when things are still being invented, like Morgan's cars and the telephone. One of the daughters in *Meet Me in St. Louis* is expecting a call which may bring a proposal of marriage, and Katie, the old-fashioned family cook, sniffing, says, "Personally I wouldn't marry a man who proposed to me over an *invention*."



But the historical change in *Meet Me in St. Louis* which really corresponds to the invention of the automobile in *The Magnificent Ambersons* is the movement of middle-class people from cities like St. Louis to cities like New York: promotion, progress. The father of the family is to be transferred by his firm, and announces the news in a manner which is both sheepish and autocratic. Everyone is upset, and the evening is rescued only when Mama sits down at the piano and plays and sings, and Papa gradually joins in to warble an old favorite. The children, scattered to their own rooms and separate sadnesses, return to contemplate the sing-song which brings back a former glow. The truce is temporary, though, and the move is still to take place.

Judy Garland, as one of the daughters, will have to leave her fiancé, and Margaret O'Brien, as the youngest daughter, will have to leave her snowmen in the garden. Garland, hoping to hearten O'Brien, memorably sings "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," but triggers off the reverse effect. O'Brien dashes down to the garden in a rage and smashes up her snowmen. Papa, observing all this, moved by his children's attachments to their home and their past, changes his mind, and decides not to go to New York. "New York," he says, "hasn't got a copyright on opportunity." There is general rejoicing, and the World's Fair, although it has been announced throughout the film, seems to arrive as a blessing on his decision. "It's where we live," Garland murmurs. "We don't have to visit here. We don't have to come on a train, or stay at a hotel, or anything....Right here where we live...." The art and the sets of the Fair, thanks no doubt to Cedric Gibbons and Edwin B. Willis, look like a prediction of the final ballet in *An American in Paris*.

Sally Benson's novel, from which the movie is taken, is fully as nostalgic as Tarkington's *The Magnificent Ambersons*. But where Welles converted nostalgia into a long moment of hesitation, Minnelli converts it into actual magic, the visual fulfillment of what a novel can only wish for. Not the real old St. Louis, but a *rewritten* St. Louis, a St. Louis we can use to cheer the scattered cities of the present, the cities of 1944 and after.

For an idea of what the absence of such a usable past is like we can turn to Gene Kelly's *Hello, Dolly!*, set in New York at the turn of the century. Once again, there are all the old fashions, trams and trolleys, and a wonderful verve and good humor. Old photographs spring to life, and the past lives again. But it lives not as encouragement to the present, not as promising repetition, but as a kind of brave mockery. Old New York, the villain of *Meet Me in St. Louis*, is the hero of *Hello, Dolly!*, a place where lovers meet and terrific parades take

place, a glorious, but still manageable metropolis. But the mood of the movie comes from its unseen, unnamed, contemporary enemy: New York in 1969, and by extension Chicago and a whole row of American cities, conglomerations of despair. It is true that Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker*, from which (via a stage musical) *Hello, Dolly!* comes, has a crack about a girl being told to go and weep in New York "where it won't be noticed." But that is just hard-boiled humor, a sort of back-handed compliment. In the movie the same line has the flavor of the New York joke about shouting fire when you need help, because then someone might come—and that joke is not a compliment in any way.

I'm not suggesting, of course, that *Hello, Dolly!* is a despairing movie, far from it. I am suggesting that its energy comes from a desire to serve as an antidote to a surrounding despair, where *Meet Me in St. Louis* could still pick up on all kinds of American hopes. Barbra Streisand, as the aging, widowed Dolly, sings impressively about the parade which will pass her by if she doesn't hurry; Judy Garland invites Margaret O'Brien to have herself a merry little Christmas. Even without Papa's change of heart about moving to New York, the second song seems full of promises, seems to offer a long string of Christmases to come.

"If he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly...." As a rough guide to foggy ground, I've been proposing a three-cornered difference: the European past, solid, indeed doom-laden, but useless, only there to be looked at; the American past, Gatsby's past, unavailable in reality, but richly available in myth; and a pastiche or parodied past, the past of so many recent movies. The third is what you get when you can't have the second. Viewed in this light, the usable past becomes one of the many myths we lost in the sixties, and whose loss is so plainly reflected in our movies. It should be clear that we didn't lose the myths simply because we saw through them. There was, strictly, nothing to see through: We never thought they were *true*. We lost them because the whole relation between reality and what we needed to believe about reality crumbled or changed, because the compact we always keep between our lives and our fictions was switched or altered.

I have tried to write about this elsewhere, and Stanley Cavell has written about it remarkably well in *The World Viewed*. But the question, in the end, doesn't really concern the movies. Or rather, the question concerns the movies and anything else which may tell us something about the way our minds interact with our world. But the answer can come only from history; from history seen as a complex understanding of complex shifts in consciousness, precisely the kind of history that movies, in spite of their wonderful, irreducible immediacy, must leave to historians. ■

Author of *America in the Movies*, Michael Wood teaches at Columbia University.

A newsletter from the  
Public Information Office  
on the Institute and its  
activities and programs.

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## Finding Out About Film Education...

What do film educators need to raise the level of cinema studies in college and university cinema courses? That's what AFI is trying to find out in a broad study this spring. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the AFI is surveying more than 4,000 college and university film and television teachers. A committee of leading educators is working on the project: Erik Barnouw, Columbia University; Edgar Dale, Ohio State University; Anna Hyer, National Education Association; Raymond Fielding, Temple University; Donald Staples, New York University; Howard Suber, University of California at Los Angeles; and Robert W. Wagner, Ohio State University. Sam L. Grogg, AFI Education Liaison, is coordinating the project. Tabulation of the results is expected by late spring, when the findings will be made public.

Ever since film became an integral part of many high school and college curricula, major problems have faced educators. Among them: Which films best illustrate the subject, and how do educators obtain these films?

In an effort to answer these and related questions the University Film Association and AFI are co-operating in another survey of film teachers throughout the United States.

The objective is a comprehensive list of "core films" that are widely used in cinema study classes to teach film aesthetics and appreciation. With a three-fold goal of ascertaining cost, quality, and accessibility of these films, the survey will also examine the state of non-theatrical film distribution to determine how it affects film use. The findings of the "core film" survey will be published as a directory as a first step in the continuing process of bringing film into the classroom. The study is under the direction of new AFI staff member Win Sharples.

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## Guests Who Are Coming to Dinner

Audrey Hepburn, whose first major film was William Wyler's *Roman Holiday*, long ago departed Hollywood and now makes Rome her home. But this month Hepburn will make a rare return to Hollywood, and the occasion is Wyler himself. She will join other important film stars who are participating in AFI's Life Achievement

Award dinner to honor Wyler and his extraordinary career as a director.

The others—all of whom have starred in Wyler films—include, so far, Henry Fonda, Greer Garson, Charlton Heston, Merle Oberon, Walter Pidgeon, James Stewart, and Harold Russell.

The award will be presented to Wyler by George Stevens, Jr., the director of AFI. CBS will broadcast the dinner on March 14 from 10 to 11:30 P.M.

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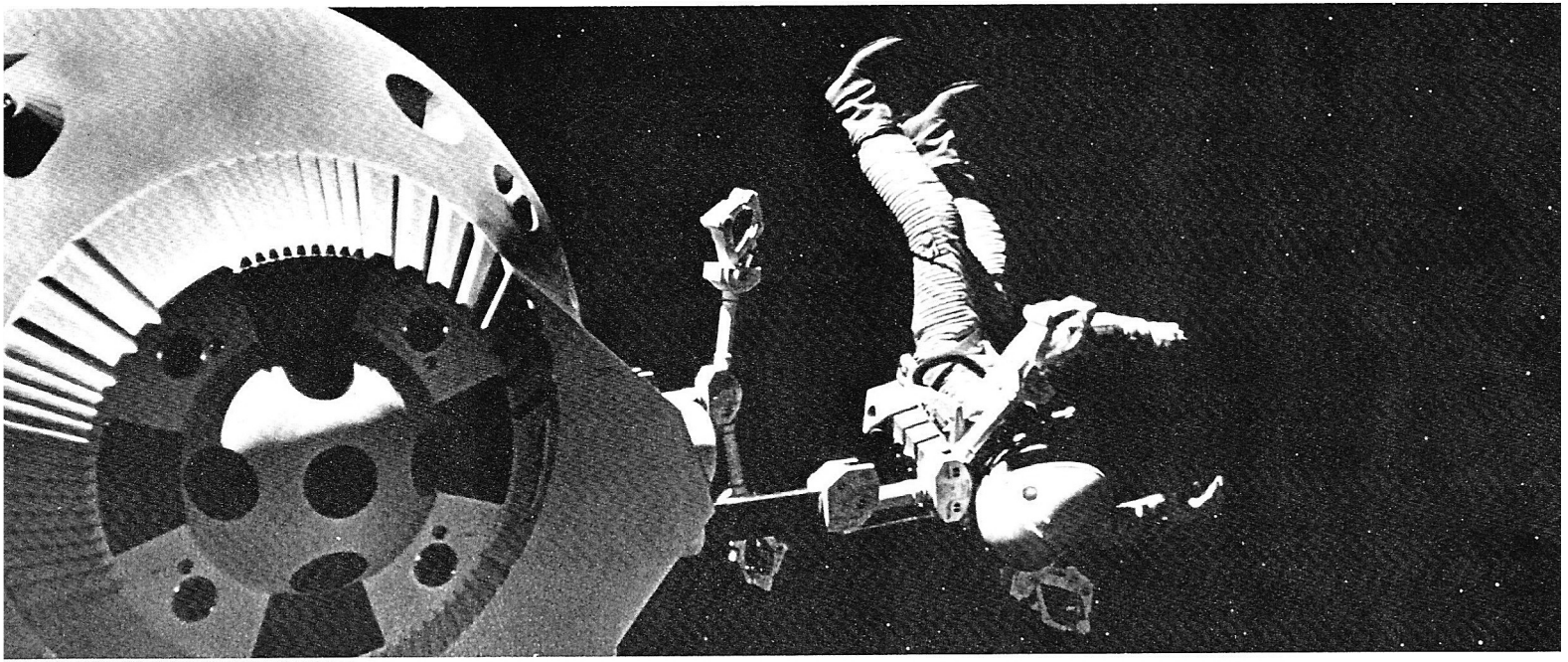
## Newcomers to AFI...

Win Sharples, Jr., has been named AFI Administrator for Preservation and Documentation with responsibility for the operations of archives and research programs. Sharples, a veteran filmmaker and educator, will administer the NEA-funded archives program, which provides substantial grants to other institutions for motion

picture preservation. These include The Library of Congress, The Museum of Modern Art, and George Eastman House.

AFI's new Public Information Officer, Gary H. Arlen, has written about communications industry activities in Washington since 1969, primarily covering cable television and video. At AFI, Arlen handles press and public inquiries about Institute activities.





# The Best of All Impossible Worlds

Little-known and unsung, the  
special effects craftsmen  
destroy and re-create the world.

James M. Martin

In its rise to the status of a mass-cult religion, film needed its necromancers—sorcerers who could defy physical laws and alter the course of nature; men who could catch the wind in nets or freeze hell. These magicians would have to be capable of decimating Chicago and Atlanta with conflagrations, of toppling Pompeii or San Francisco with tremblers, or ravaging Peking or Cairo with plagues of locusts. Eventually, they would be called on to send gigantic apes scrambling up skyscrapers and to shrink men to the size of amoebas.

Often, the finest moments in an otherwise mediocre movie are those contributed by the special effects team. The real star of Paramount's *The Mountain*, for example, is not Spencer Tracy but the title character, Mount Chambeyron, an 11,155-foot peak brought to Farciot Edouart's Vista-Vision process screen on Stage 2, where the actor merely scaled plaster precipices only a few feet high. *Jack the Giant Killer* would have been nothing but a cornball juvenile action-adventure yarn had not Jim Danforth and Howard Anderson, Jr., created its fanciful dragons and hellish specters using animated miniatures and complex optical printing. And how could we sit through a single reel of the agonizingly banal *Krakatoa, East of Java*, with no promise that the climax would be a recreation of the famous 1883 volcanic eruption which scattered detritus as far as 4,500 miles distant?

The shamans of the movies are the special effects

*Above: Astronaut rescue attempt from 2001. The capsule's a miniature; the stars are matted in.*

*Below: Uneven floor tiles betray poor optical work in Alice in Wonderland.*

men, who make their livings by playing God. And most are exceptionally clever at it. Unfortunately, they're among the industry's most unsung heroes, for the more proficient their performance, the less we are aware of their contributions. Film effects can be said to "work"—that is, to be *effective*—only insofar as they enhance a scene with unimpeachable realism. Their magic must be so craftily wrought as to betray no trace of fakery, no legerdemain. Outside the industry, how many people, for example, knew that the Chicago skyline seen in *The Sting* was a composite, partly the Santa Monica pier and partly a naturalistic matte painting by Albert Whitlock?

Matte painters like Whitlock reduce to absurdity the hoary dictum that Art imitates Life. Their renderings of nonexistent settings insist that Art *is* Life—a notion which would have aestheticians from Aristotle to Ortega y Gasset reeling in their graves. Matte shots are as old as the story film itself. In 1903 Edwin S. Porter used an in-camera matte to depict the arrival of a locomotive and cars seen through a station window in *The Great Train Robbery*.

Probably the most celebrated use of matte paintings was by Orson Welles, who employed scores of them in both *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*. In fact, the splendor that was "Xanadu," Kane's tastelessly opulent estate, did not exist apart from a sequence of Linwood Dunn mattes, subtly photographed and dissolved together in an impressionistic montage. "*Citizen Kane*," Dunn recalls, "was about fifty percent optically duped, and some reels consisted of ninety percent optically printed footage."

The undisputed master of matte painting today is Albert Whitlock, who painted the streets of old New York seen in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and the vast fields of oil derricks in *Oklahoma Crude*.





*The parting of the Red Sea in DeMille's The Ten Commandments took fourteen months and a million dollars to assemble on the optical printer.*

Audiences watching Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* were mostly oblivious to the fact that when Paul Newman eludes spies inside a European museum, the building's rococo wonders were no more than paint from Whitlock's brush. In his obsession with verisimilitude, Whitlock even stroked in shafts of sunlight from windows near the ceiling. And the waters of the Caribbean in his matte painting of the Havana harbor in *Topaz* only seem to dance in the sun—yet another Whitlock fata morgana.

The wedding of matte art to photographed reality was enormously facilitated by the invention of the optical printer, a device which came into being about 1930 and which was to prove equally revolutionary. Easily the most versatile tool of the effects trade, the printer is a cumbersome apparatus; some are as large as Honda Civics and with about as many dials, switches, gauges, and gizmos as a 747 flight deck.

Basically nothing more than a glorified camera-projector combination, it is capable of infinite manipulations of time, space, and image—from simple transitional devices, like fades and dissolves, to complex effects, like the so-called traveling matte.

Once described as “the foremost optical printer virtuoso in the industry,” Linwood Dunn can be credited with devising the harum-scarum climax of Stanley Kramer's *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. In this complex effects sequence, we see a zany gaggle of lunatics scramble aboard an upright fire truck ladder, which then flings them far and wide—into palm trees, through open windows, and onto crackling power lines.

To film it, Dunn combined miniatures in three different scales, several matte paintings, dust effects, live action inserts using a split-screen, and precision optical printing. This necessitated running the negative through the printer twenty-one times. The end result was incredible, especially

when one considers that two of the elements—a department-store roof constructed on a hill at Universal Studios, and auto traffic on Venice Boulevard in Culver City—were photographed at locations fifteen miles apart, yet both appear in the same shot of the finished film.

Although, as *Variety* noted, the effects in DeMille's 1956 version of *The Ten Commandments* “do not escape a certain theatricality,” the Red Sea sequence still ranks as one of the all-time great effects scenes, and it would not have been possible without the optical printer. John Fulton and assistants spent fourteen months and almost a million dollars to shoot it. They composited matte paintings, miniatures, optical effects, and full-scale scenes shot on location in Europe—a total of twelve original negatives combined into one master on the printer.

Process photography—shooting action against static backgrounds—might be termed “ubiquity unlimited.” Sailors can go to sea without ever leaving the sound stage, and mountaineers can scale peaks without ever setting foot on them. If you are a Hitchcock fan, you've no doubt seen dozens of process shots, for the Master of Suspense swears by them. Had it not been for process photography, his hair-raising chase in and about the presidential faces of Mount Rushmore—in *North by Northwest*—would have been impossible to film.

Since MGM couldn't go to the mountains, Hitchcock had the mountains moved to Metro. Cary Grant's double slugged it out with the spies in front of a large process screen, on which fine-grain transparencies were projected from the rear. Some of Hitchcock's finest scenes were the result of collaboration with Farciot Edouart, winner of at least a dozen of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Scientific/Technical Awards and the most talented process man in the business.

But rear projection has its limitations, not the least of which are the difficulties in avoiding “hot spots” on the screen and washouts of the images due to spillover from lights on the action. Brighter, larger backgrounds can be projected using the relatively new “reflex front projection” system, so breathtakingly employed by Stanley Kubrick for the panoramic savanna “Dawn of Man” prologue in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Conceivably, Kubrick could have shot the entire sequence of the apes discovering the luminous monolith by use of animated miniatures. The miniaturists are the lords of Lilliput; it's hardly surprising that one of them worked on a picture entitled *The Three Worlds of Gulliver*. Like the gods of Olympus, they manipulate mythic monsters, whole fleets of ships, and all manner of catastrophic events.

A. Arnold Gillespie, Oscar-winner for *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, *Green Dolphin Street*, *Plymouth Adventure*, and *Ben-Hur*, even created in miniature an A-bomb blast so realistic that it fooled the Manhattan Project people, and the U.S. Air Force used the footage for years in a training film.

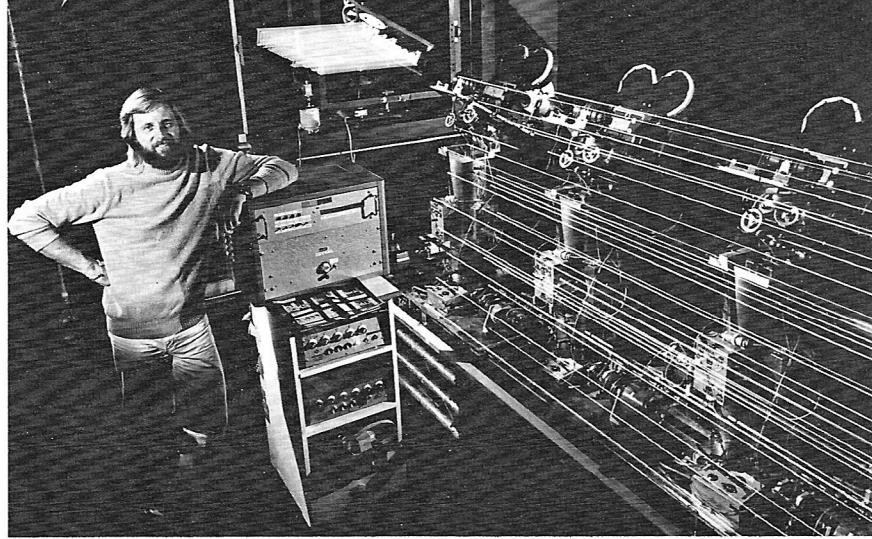
The movie was *The Beginning or the End*, which was supposed to show the bombing of Hiroshima, an event that was not officially photographed. Also, all technical details were classified at the time (1947). Gillespie, recalling a Tarzan film he'd seen, observed that each time the ape-man stabbed a crocodile underwater, blood would float up to the surface in the shape of a mushroom cloud. So he put his camera underwater, inside a tank, and shot his "holocaust" with exploding sacks of dye.

Another of his inspirations occurred during the shooting of *The Good Earth*, which climaxes with a plague of locusts. Locust plagues being an infrequent and unpredictable phenomena, Gillespie faked one by inverting his camera, underwater again, and shooting coffee grounds as they rolled down a sheet of corrugated Masonite. When turned upright and optically printed over shots of wheat fields, the footage showed what appeared to be a black, undulating swarm of insects, an effect augmented by close shots of tiny, pickled grasshoppers dangling from toothpicks.

Miniaturists are nearly always called in to wreak havoc in catastrophicks, that genre which appeals to the anarchist in all of us, with plots constructed around all manner of natural and man-made disasters. One splendid exception was *San Francisco*, whose trembler was created using full-scale mechanicals and stunt work, skillfully edited into a montage by John Hoffman, who could only have been inspired by Eisenstein. *Earthquake* was an even more ambitious (and most costly) undertaking. Frank Brendel, who did the full-scale action scenes, recalls that director Mark Robson "went for broke; everything was done for real, and it looks real." Whereas the actors in *San Francisco* merely dodged "debris" which was rear-projected behind them, Robson's 141 stunt players—the largest number ever assembled for a single picture—were pelted with weighted styrofoam "blocks." These scenes were intercut with footage of miniature buildings constructed with such keen regard for detail that their cornices would fall sooner than the steel superstructure, as would be the case in reality.

So little miniature work is being done nowadays that some of the better miniaturists have sought employment outside the industry or else have gone into retirement. Furthermore, like blacksmiths, effects men seem to be an endangered species; their art a slowly dying one and few stellar shamans rising from the younger generation.

Glen Robinson, who built the miniatures for *Earthquake*, had been working at Magic Mountain, an amusement park near Los Angeles, and his co-worker, Clifford Stine, had retired and moved to Mississippi, when they were pressed into service. Their largest miniature in this case was a three-quarter-inch scale model of the Hollywood dam. Stine, an expert at making mountains out of molehills, shot the dam burst at dusk, using a day-for-night effect to heighten realism and hide bugaboos. The crew had nine cameras going, rolling at speeds



*Bob Abel uses a slit-scan camera stand to "paint" with light on unexposed film.*

between 96 and 120 frames per second. The full-scale flood scenes which follow were shot using dump tanks which unleashed 5,500 gallons of water in three seconds.

Albert Whitlock did forty matte paintings for *Earthquake*, one of them a vast panorama of the San Andreas fault, stretching halfway across California. One memorable shot, of people plummeting from a swaying building, was created on the optical printer, using a split-screen to composite full-scale action with a building miniature that rocked on a hydraulic platform. The mechanicals required as many as fifty-five men, each with a wire to pull or cut, a hydraulic ram to activate, or a cache of styrofoam blocks to drop on cue. Scenes that took a full workweek to set up for filming last only seconds on screen.

*The Towering Inferno* brought L. B. Abbott out of retirement. Every set in the movie had to be constructed in miniature for the scenes of conflagration. Shots of the high-rise skyscraper itself were matted, using the first three floors of a real building in San Francisco, plus a painting of the remaining floors. Many scenes required traveling mattes, such as when we see fireman Steve McQueen dangling from a helicopter with the San Francisco Bay in the background.

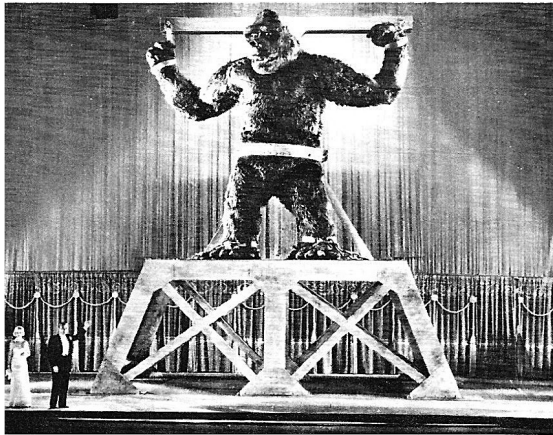
Destruction is international.

Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, and other London landmarks were demolished by Gorgo, a man-sized beast so cleverly designed that the technician inside could make the monster's red-tinged eyes blink. Poor Tokyo, though, has been besieged by more chimeras than any capital on earth, threatened repeatedly by Rodan, Godzilla, the Mysterians, and an unheavenly host of cheap imitations. Apparently, the redoubtable Eiji Tsuburaya, Toho Studios' "master of monsters," has a yen for mayhem and gets his jollies by razing Japan's shrines.



The pioneer of animated miniatures, however, was an American, Willis O'Brien, who created in 1925 the dinosaurs seen in *The Lost World*; in 1933 the ape in *King Kong*; and in 1949 the gorilla for *Mighty Joe Young*. O'Brien and his crew spent a full two years animating the ape sequences for *Kong*, shooting them in painstaking stop-frame animation. One of the sorcerer's apprentices on the film was Ray Harryhausen, whose "Dynamation" pictures (including *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* and *Jason and the Argonauts*) have made his name a household word in sci-fi fantasy circles.

Traditionally, leviathans and other denizens of the deep have been entrusted to experts in the use of full-scale mechanicals, making them easier to photograph in combat with seamen. The whale in *Moby Dick* and the blue marlin in *The Old Man and the Sea* were rather ersatz creations (a point which did not escape critics at the time), but the giant squids in Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* were surprisingly realistic. Small wonder that their creator, Bob Matthey, was hired by the producers of *Jaws* to fashion a believable great white shark.



King Kong. Here two separate shots are combined through the matte process.

"Bruce," as Matthey's mechanical fish was christened by the crew, was actually three sharks: a "right-hand" shark with controls exposed on the left; a "left-hand" shark, with controls on the right; and a full-size "floater," towed by a boat. Bruce cost a quarter-million dollars to build and, producers say, another \$500,000 to operate. (They haven't regretted the expense, considering the picture has grossed, so far, over \$150 million!)

The sharks' skin was made of Lasmer, a liquid plastic, which technicians sprayed with silica sand so that water would bead up on it and run off realistically. Both the right- and left-hand mock-ups were equipped with hydraulics, pneumatics, and electronic controls. Their backbones were made of tubular and spring steel, and their innards consisted of five hundred feet of tubing, twenty-five remote-controlled valves, and twenty electric and pneumatic hoses. Oh...incidentally, Bruce had a set of soft false teeth, shoved into his jaws for the filming of stunt scenes.

Mechanical squids are not the only things to have distinguished the Walt Disney Production's effects

department over the years. They came up with the best method of combining live action with animation—the "sodium-vapor process," which is similar to traveling mattes, except it requires special stock, special lighting, and even special cameras. Audiences continue to be amazed and delighted when they see Uncle Remus singing with a quartet of bees who alight on his index finger, just as they are when Bert the chimney sweep dances with painted penguins in a pastel-colored park. More pictures, like *Song of the South* and *Mary Poppins*, might be produced at Disney were it not for the sad fact that the sodium-vapor process, like the multi-plane animation seen in *Fantasia* and other cartoon features, is rapidly becoming prohibitively expensive.

Inflation is ruining everything these days, and film effects are no exception. There was a time when filmmakers, having muffed a shot, could have caddged a bit more money for retakes; but, alas, no more. Some producers just won't accept the fact that there can be no such thing as a "cheap epic." *The Ten Commandments* simply could not be made today; so much was spent on it two decades ago that one Hollywood wag suggested it cost Paramount Pictures "a million dollars for each commandment."

"The Golden Age of Effect Films" may have reached its zenith with Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which contains a whopping total of 205 effects scenes, more than any film before or since. None of its effects was achieved by conventional means. When Kubrick and his crew exhausted all modifications of existing techniques, they invented new ones. These included a reflex front-projection system and the amazing "slit-scan" apparatus, making possible the "Dawn of Man" and "Stargate" sequences, respectively.

Douglas Trumbull, who designed the slit-scan used in the film, and Con Pederson, another of the effects supervisors, are part of a new generation of effects artists—avant-gardists who eschew traditional techniques and experiment with ingenious new ways of doing and seeing. They've discovered in television a fertile field in which to plow new ground for special effects. ABC-TV hired Trumbull to slit-scan one season's network logos and TV movie lead-in's, the results being redolent of Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase"—in 3-D! Trumbull went on to direct a feature of his own, *Silent Running*, a science fiction movie for which, needless to say, he did the special effects.

At one time or another, both Trumbull and Pederson have been associated with Bob Abel, whose production company was responsible for the extraordinary 7-Up commercial using slit-scan and a variety of techniques, all new or modifications of older methods. Tracing the four-decade history of the soft drink through the metamorphosis of its bottle and carton design, Abel used two motifs: a butterfly-woman and a vast sea of bubbles, with Peter Max-type symbolism and period music. The effect is so hypnotic and hallucinogenic that while

*Continued on page 49*



# Dialogue on Film



## Elia Kazan

An inquiry into the arts and crafts of filmmaking through interview seminars between Fellows and prominent filmmakers held at Greystone, under the auspices of The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies. This educational series is directed by James Powers.



Marlon Brando, in his more laconic days, once summed up the only unanimous view of Elia Kazan: "He's wonderful with actors." On nearly every other aspect of a long career as a stage director, film director, and novelist, Kazan has always drawn a stormy array of conflicting comment.

But in his direction of actors—particularly the new and promising—Kazan holds a unique place. Playwrights have praised him. Tennessee Williams has spoken of Kazan's "phenomenal rapport with actors." And demanding critics like Harold Clurman have praised him: "He is one of the best directors for actors—both on stage and in films." Kazan has been associated with many of the more extraordinary actors of the last few decades: Brando, Rod Steiger, James Dean, Kim Hunter, Warren Beatty, Lee J. Cobb, Julie Harris, Karl Mal-

den, Lee Remick, Montgomery Clift, Eva Marie Saint. And even when the films have shown the wear of time, the performances have not. Brando's overwhelming portrayal of Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1952) remains one of the achievements of American film.

Kazan started in the theater as an actor. After two years at the Yale University School of Drama, Kazan joined, in the early thirties, the Group Theater in New York and appeared in a number of plays. Clurman recalls that Kazan in 1935 gave "magnificent performances" in a series of three Clifford Odets plays, including *Waiting for Lefty*. He also acted in several films, perhaps most memorably as a gangster in *City for Conquest* (1940).

Kazan, while at the Group Theater, turned to directing, and in the forties mounted such important works of the American stage as Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* with Tallulah Bankhead, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* with Ed Begley, and *Death of a Salesman* with Lee J. Cobb. Kazan's production of *Death of a Salesman* has become the measure by which all subsequent productions of that enduring work have been judged.

Kazan's stage work led to his founding—with Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg—of the Actors' Studio in 1948. The studio's approach, sometimes called the Method School of Acting, gained wide attention—and notoriety—from the fiery performances of celebrated graduates like Brando, Dean, Paul Newman, and Eva Marie Saint.

Kazan came late to filmmaking. His first feature, made in 1945 for Fox, was a benign *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, with Dorothy McGuire. But, as a director, Kazan went on to explore

strong social themes: Anti-Semitism in *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947); miscarriage of justice in *Boomerang!* (1947); racial prejudice in *Pinky* (1949); and union corruption in *On the Waterfront* (1954). Kazan's work in the theater with such notable playwrights as Wilder, Williams, Miller, and William Inge gave him an unusual respect for the screenwriter—a respect not always shared by other directors. Budd Schulberg, who wrote *On the Waterfront*, says, "He's been a pioneer, sometimes I think the *only* pioneer, in treating screenplays with the same respect that he would give a work written for the stage."

Kazan has also been something of a pioneer in the impassioned, personal work, in the controversial work—and controversy has embroiled him in his own life. His candid testimony in the early fifties before the House Un-American Activities Committee is an example. If anything, his work has taken on a more unapologetically personal stamp—particularly his best-selling novels. *America, America*, published in 1961, is a thoroughly personal account of his family's emigration to this country. Kazan, who was born in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1909, emigrated to America in 1913 with his parents, both of Greek descent. His other novels, *The Arrangement* (1967), *The Assassins* (1972) and *The Understudy* (1975) have also shown a strong personal vision.

The results of Kazan's widely ranging work, by his own admission, have been of varying quality. But the works have always been infused with the intensity of an individual response to the experience of living in America. At the time of this seminar Kazan was about to begin the direction of *The Last Tycoon*.







**Question:** Fame sometimes affects the work of directors. Do you think it's affected yours?

**Kazan:** You'd be amazed how unfamous I feel. I still feel in many ways like a beginner, and part of it is that I've never continued the same thing. I'm writing books, and all my books are put down in America. I've never gotten a really good notice, except once for *The Arrangement*, and a couple medium-sized ones on the other books. I've never really been accepted by the literary fraternity, and that keeps you on your toes. I'm still writing. I've got two more books in first draft. So I've never felt arrived, if that's the word. I don't feel like an expert or a particularly knowledgeable person. I'm trying hard. I don't think any of my films are completely successful. But taking them all together, I'm proud of them. I think I've done something that is myself. But I'm not finished yet. I feel like a young man. I've got good spirits and good energy. I'm still a person in the middle of life, even though I don't look it at times.

**Question:** You have a reputation for discovering stars and for not being afraid to use untrained actors. What do you look for in a performer?

**Kazan:** Very often big stars are barely trained or not very well trained. They also have bad habits: They don't want to look bad, and they protect themselves; or they're not pliable any more. They know what their act is. If I put them in a scene that's a little bit dangerous, their agents come to see me. Besides, they cost a lot of money. I'm now doing a picture that's a circus. It's got everybody in it: Robert DeNiro, Jack Nicholson, Robert Mitchum, Tony Curtis, Jeanne Moreau, Donald Pleasence. Like in a circus, first the lions come on, then the tightrope walkers. I don't mind it though. It's sort of fun.

But if the subject is very real, and you're saying, "This actually happened, not quite as I've shown it perhaps, but real life is reflected here," you'd better get real people all around you. There's a new breed of stars coming up now which is a hell of a lot better for my purposes. To take unknowns is a gamble, and I've taken that gamble. Sometimes it

has come through, and in a couple instances it has not. I think the time it hurt me most was in *America, America*. That picture would have been better if I'd run across DeNiro or Al Pacino or Dustin Hoffman. I took a calculated risk and lost. But I am not afraid to use anyone, because I was an actor and this makes me have less respect.

I don't have a mystique about what an actor can contribute. You can have damn good actors, and they can louse you up. But I don't have an awe of them, nor am I afraid of them. Now what I try to do is to get to know them very well. I take them to dinner. I talk to them. I meet their wives. I find out what the hell the human material is that I'm dealing with, so that by the time I take an unknown he's not an unknown to me.

**Question:** Where did you find the lead actor, Stathis Giallelis, in *America, America*?

**Kazan:** He was from around Athens, a property man for a small Greek filmmaker. He had never acted before. I bundled him on a plane and brought him back to America, with some misgivings. And I still have some. I rehearsed him a lot. I did about three weeks of improvisation before we started, and I gave him voice lessons. The damned voice lessons didn't take. He doesn't speak English any better today than he did during the film. It hurt the film, I think, because I was worried about his being understood. The boy, with the change of administrations in Greece, has gone back to Greece, which is where he belongs.

**Question:** Where did you find those evocative faces for the Ellis Island sequence in *America, America*?

**Kazan:** That scene was shot in an abandoned customs warehouse in Athens. We sent trucks up to the border between Greece and Bulgaria. There were camps up there of people who had crossed over from the Communist countries of Bulgaria or Rumania into Greece. By God, their clothing, their looks, above all their faces, were perfect for that part. These people's deprivation, their hardship, and their continuous anxiety worked for me. How do you direct them? Well, you didn't have to much.

*Stathis Giallelis in America, America.*  
"Sometimes the face of a real person  
is far more eloquent than any actor."



What counts is what they looked like and how they were dressed and the positions I put them in.

Sometimes the face of a real person is far more eloquent than any actor can achieve. There's something about almost all actors that is well-fed looking. If you have a scene of either a working-class person or a person deprived by life or a person who is hard up, it's much better sometimes to get a face. You can't beat cops in cop roles. They play cops very well. Fellini says, "I don't give a damn how they talk or whether they talk at all. I'll dub that in later. Give me the face." The face is a piece of statuary, it's a piece of revelation.

**Question:** Andy Griffith wasn't exactly an unknown before *A Face in the Crowd*, though he wasn't known as an actor. But his performance is probably the best of his career.

**Kazan:** He was not an actor, but a monologist. He was very eager to be good, and he had none of the defenses that stars usually have. He didn't necessarily want to look a certain way or come on a certain way. There are scenes in that movie that I would say would be difficult for anybody. It's a very hard part to do. I think the film walks a very tight line, and I'm not sure it bridges satire and tragedy altogether successfully. We were satirizing the whole scene of public communication. The film was made in 1956, and I think we anticipated a lot of what happened in Nixon's time and what is happening today. We tried to both satirize it on the one hand, and then get some sort of human portrait of a man on the other. I would say that considering what Andy was he gave an excellent performance.

**Question:** Was there any relationship between the McCarthy hearings and this film?

**Kazan:** No. We started out from a short story by Budd Schulberg on the threat of television and the power of television. We were saying beware of it, but also saying that it would be a force for good. I believe that television is a terrific force for good. When you see people in close-up behaving off guard, I think you understand them. That was the case in the McCarthy hearings when McCarthy at

one point whispered to Roy Cohn. I don't think anyone who saw it will ever forget that whisper.

**Question:** Like Andy Griffith, James Dean came to you as something of an unknown—a temperamental unknown. How did you work with him on *East of Eden*?

**Kazan:** He did a thing that always attracts me: He wasn't polite to me. He made me feel he wasn't straining to butter me up, that he had a real sense of himself. When I met him he said, "I'll take you for a ride on my motorbike." It was very hard for him to talk, and riding me on the back of his motorbike, which I did like a damn fool around the streets of New York, was his way of communicating with me. He had his own way, and I thought he was perfect for the part. I thought he was an extreme grotesque of a boy, a twisted boy. As I got to know his father, as I got to know about his family, I learned that he had been, in fact, twisted by the denial of love.

I went to Jack Warner and told him that I wanted to use an absolutely unknown boy. Jack was a crapshooter of the first water, and he said, "Go ahead." He wouldn't do that now. Nobody would do that now. I went back to New York and said to Jimmy, "We're going to California. Be at my house at such and such a time." Jimmy shows up with two packages—wrapped in paper. He'd never been on an airplane before. We arrived, and we were heading toward the studio when Jimmy said, "Can we stop here a minute? My father lives in there." We stopped and he went in and got his father. Out came a man who was as tense as Jimmy was, and they hardly could look at each other. It was the goddamndest affirmation of a hunch that I had ever seen. They could hardly talk; they mumbled at each other. I don't know what the hell Jimmy stopped to see him for, because in a few minutes he said, "Let's go."

I got him fixed in a room, and I took him to the lot to shoot some wardrobe tests. The crew couldn't believe it. They said, "Is that the stand-in?" This was a good sign for me because he looked real. He looked like an actual person. We started working. With his first money Jimmy bought a palomino



horse. When he got into problems with a girl friend, I moved him into a dressing room at the studio, and I moved in next door. I was anxious that he was going to do something terrible. I didn't think he would complete the picture. He was an extremely sick boy at that time. There's a saying that success is harder to take than failure. It's a rather shaky statement, but let's say there's some truth in it. Success was sure hard for him to take.

**Question:** I know you have a high regard for *East of Eden*. Would you call it your best film?

**Kazan:** I don't think I've ever made a film in which I've achieved everything I've wanted perfectly. I don't think any of my films are perfect. The nearest one to it, I think, would be *East of Eden*, though it's not my favorite film.

**Question:** Which is?

**Kazan:** *America, America* because I wrote it and it's about my uncle. I have a great fondness for that film. I love the music, and I love the country. But it's far from perfect. It's full of flaws. *East of Eden* achieves its goals almost without fault. I think all the actors are excellent. Another film that I like a lot is *Viva Zapata!*, which is most imperfect. I think some of the sequences are not achieved well at all. There's one sequence in the picture I detest, where he says, "I can't read." Every time I look at it I turn away. I wish they'd put a commercial there. But I think other sequences are as good as I've ever done.

**Question:** Did you run into any problems dealing with a mythical figure like Zapata?

**Kazan:** I sure did. John Steinbeck and I did the script. We wanted to shoot it, naturally, in Mexico, and we thought, these guys would love it. We're going to make an international film about Zapata, their national hero. But we ran into Gabby Figueroa, who was the head of the syndicate down there, and he asked for certain controls and script changes. When we said no, he said, "We won't let you shot it here. Don't you understand? Suppose I

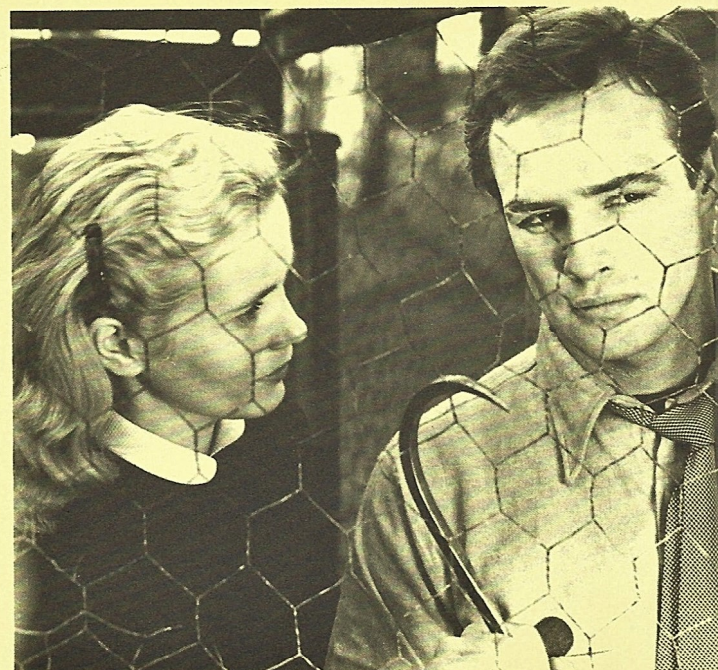
took a crew, went up to Illinois, and did a picture about Abraham Lincoln with Mexican actors. How would you feel?"

So we shot it right on the border of Mexico. We used to go over to Mexico for lunch, and we had a lot of Mexicans come over and got a Mexican band. We got as close as we could get, but I think I could have done it better in the state of Morales, which is south of Mexico City. When I saw the city down there with its rocks—it's a little bit like Galway in Ireland, with its rock walls—I knew I could have been photographing the poverty rather than talking about the poverty.

**Question:** You once said that you regard *Zapata* as your first cinematically structured film. That makes *Streetcar Named Desire* a photographed play.

**Kazan:** Exactly. On *Streetcar* we worked very hard to open it up, and then went back to the play because we'd lost all the compression. In the play, these people were trapped in a room with each other. What I actually did was to make the set smaller. As the story progressed I took out little flats, and the set got smaller and smaller. But the first cinematic picture I ever did was not *Viva Zapata*. I had made up my mind to do a silent picture, and it was called *Panic in the Streets*. There is talk in it, but really the story is all told by pictures. Then I did *Zapata*.

I had learned a lot, as I did from two directors I



*Eva Marie Saint, Marlon Brando in  
On the Waterfront.*





*A Streetcar Named Desire. The sisters—Vivien Leigh as Blanche, Kim Hunter as Stella.*

*Blanche DuBois and brother-in-law Stanley Kowalski (Marlon Brando).*



liked when I first came here; Jean Renoir, whom I think is a god, and Jack Ford. I used to hang around Ford and get his goddamned sour answers, which I adored. I began to say, I must learn from Ford. I must learn to hold the long shot and trust the long shot, not cut into it. A theater-trained person wants to jump in and see the facial expression when the facial expression is sometimes more banal than if left a mystery. The first film I made that I feel is cinematically interesting is *Zapata*.

**Question:** As a theater-trained director, what difference do you find in working with actors in film?

**Kazan:** In a film what you're trying to do is to lay

down the basic behavior patterns of a person. For example, I'm now doing *The Last Tycoon*. Robert DeNiro is playing Monroe Stahr, an urban Jew, an intellectual, who was born with a rheumatic heart, who dresses up to his role as the head of the studio. Bobby has never played anything but a street-smart kid. Bobby has never played an educated part, an executive who could run a studio. So I've been doing improvisations with him in an office with a secretary and an assistant secretary and four or five people coming in. The phone never stops ringing.

I've impressed on Bobby that what he says is never a comment. Whatever he says is an instruction which someone has to do something about. For several days on the set I've harassed the hell



Anthony Quinn and Marlon Brando  
as the Zapata brothers in *Viva Zapata!*,  
screenplay by John Steinbeck.



out of DeNiro. I've made him feel that his life is at the mercy of his anteroom, that he's a victim of the phone. I've now got him realizing what it means to be an executive. I've tried to use in the improvisations the actors whom I'm going to use in the movie so he'll begin to get familiar with the world he's going to move in. I've also tried to get DeNiro, one would say, to "think" like an intellectual, to consider things in ambivalence, to see more than one side of something. Also, I've kept him away from the actress who's playing Kathleen, an ethereal or unearthly figure. If he becomes too familiar with her, it'll hurt the scenes when we shoot them. So he's been instructed by me not to chat with her, not to make friends with her, not to go around with her, not to have dinner with her, but to keep her at a distance.

So what am I doing? I'm building up behavior patterns. In a play you have two-and-a-half weeks to prepare. They tell you three-and-a-half—it's a lie. Somewhere in the third week everyone descends on you with the sets and the costumes and his worries. Everyone comes after you saying that this is not working, that is not working. You have to be very strong and very clear about what you want, because one of the first things you have to do is mount the play. I take much longer than most. I don't do it until the end of the second week. A lot of anxious directors do it earlier, and maybe they're right. Garson Kanin has a run-through after two days. I just don't believe in that. No play is perfect,

and you're going to make changes in it. You may also go out on the road with it. You're trying out the play, not just the performances.

Sam Spiegel, who's producing *The Last Tycoon*, worked a year and a half with Harold Pinter on the script. I made up my mind to do it as written. So here I'm not trying out the play anymore. I'm trying to do what the French call "realize" the play. It's a very apt word. You do realize it. You do bring it to life.

**Question:** DeNiro excepted, what atmosphere do you work for among your actors?

**Kazan:** A continual effort of getting them to know each other. For example, I take them to dinner. When I see them together I realize a lot about their relationship which is basic and not even expressed. I see how they relate, how they look together. I have kept people apart. In *The Visitors*—don't repeat this—I stirred up small antagonisms between the actor who played the husband and others. It's certainly uncomfortable but I do it. I think it adds a lot.

**Question:** How much room is there for the contribution of the actors?

**Kazan:** Once I give the actors the basic objectives of a scene, I try to leave room so that anything they have to contribute can be used. In other words, I say, "Here's the road. Now you can run or do anything down that road you want, but you've got to stay on that road." Somebody once said you're much freer when you know your boundaries. There is truth in that. When I talk to the actors, they begin to give me ideas, and I grab them because the ideas they give me turn them on. I want the breath of life from them rather than the mechanical fulfillment of the movement which I asked.

**Question:** How do you work with actors on a typical scene?

**Kazan:** You know, they say I'm an acting director, which I don't take as a compliment. I don't really agree, but I do deal with actors a lot. I love actors. I



used to be an actor for eight years, so I do appreciate their job. One of the most important things in an acting scene, especially a short acting scene, is not to talk about the scene that precedes but to play out the scene that precedes. You play out what the actors come from or what they come from psychologically, so that their ride into a scene is a correct one.

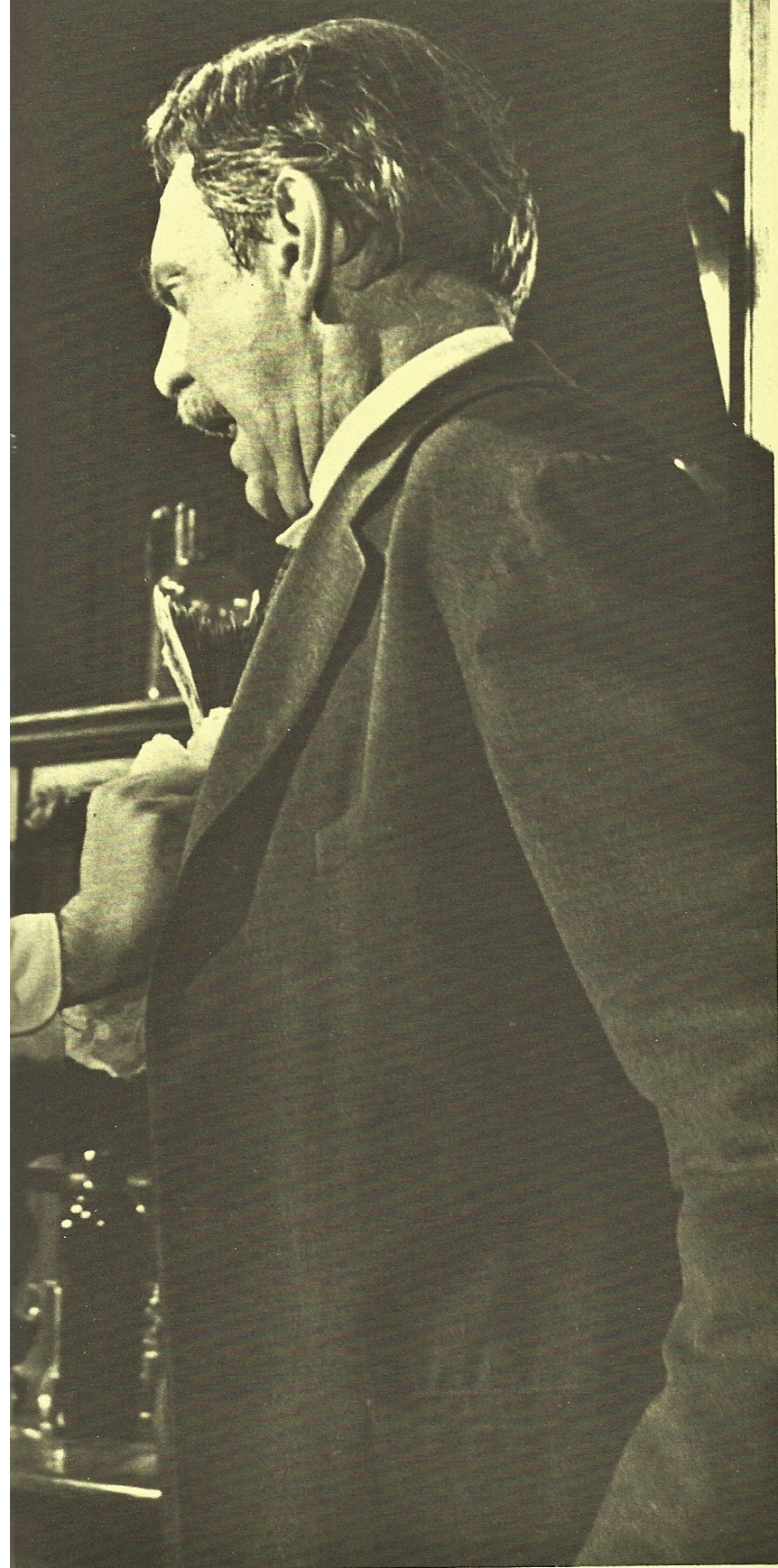
In other words, the actors come in with the experience that they would come in with in life. And none of us comes into any scene in life naked. You go home to your wife after you've had a bad day at the office, and it's a different scene than if you've had an exhilarating day. What precedes a scene is important. Once you've done that, you divide the scene—or I tend to—into sections, into movements. Stanislavski called them “beats.” The point is that there are sections in life. Sometimes even a short scene has a three-act structure. You lay bare to the actor, you make him understand and appreciate, the structure beneath the lines. That's what's often called the subtext, and dealing with the subtext is one of the critical elements in directing actors. In other words, not what is said, but what happens. Particularly with a writer like Harold Pinter, who is so oblique. What he says is often the opposite of what is happening, or only related indirectly to what is happening.

**Question:** You've performed in plays and in several films. Does your own acting experience help you to communicate with your actors?

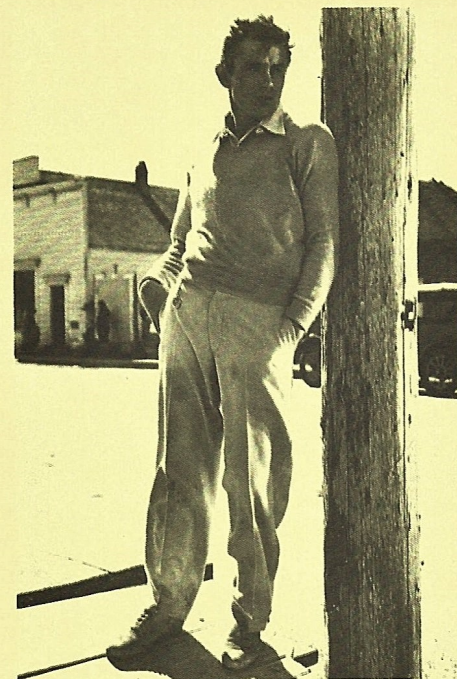
**Kazan:** It definitely does. I put it in a bad way before when I said that I'm not afraid of actors. I'm not afraid to make demands on them. I believe they can give me more. I reach into them for more. And I think it's fascinating to see this on the screen instead of just a face and a piece of behavior. There are directors, very famous ones, who completely disagree: “I don't want you to act. Don't give me any goddamned Actors' Studio stuff.” Basically, the people I choose to work with are creative people who are sensitive, who want to be good, who have some aspiration in them. You don't deal with actors as dolls. You deal with them as people who are poets to a certain degree.







*James Dean, Raymond Massey in East of Eden. "Dean had his own way, and I thought he was perfect for the part. I thought he was an extreme grotesque of a boy, a twisted boy."*



**Question:** Still, for you the director's role is paramount. Have years of experience as a strong director made your choices easier on a set?

**Kazan:** I find that the more you know the more difficulty you're in, because you know how many different ways something can be done. The terrible thing about film directing is that you wake up at four in the morning after you've shot and say, "Damn it, why did I do that scene that way? I could have done it differently." The most important thing is to get alone on the set in the morning, when your brain is still fairly clear, and sit there with coffee or a cigar and just think about what you feel and what you're trying to get over and how you can get it over.

**Question:** Are you ever in conflict when you both produce and direct the same film?

**Kazan:** Let me give some background first. I wrote books for seven years, and certain personal events made me decide to stop writing books. I'd produced eight films, and there was no conflict because I had my own group of actors, more or less. They were all my friends, most of them in the Actors' Studio in New York. I had my own staff; they were all close friends of mine. I wouldn't even call them a staff: They were friends of mine with whom I made pictures. I had an ideal situation. This ended for me when I started to write books.



Now I want to make films again, and I want, above all, to make the other half of *America, America* and another film—two films I very much want to make. But it would take me a year to write a script, so I decided to jump in now and do a film. Sam Spiegel I admire. I like him. He's a very bright guy. And Harold Pinter I love. He's one of the nicest men I've met and one of the most interesting. And when they offered *The Last Tycoon* to me I said, "What the hell, I'll start." Now is there a conflict? There are conflicts now. There are conflicts when you produce and direct because you're watching two things at once: You're watching the budget, and you're watching your own desires. There are conflicts now: I want one thing, and Spiegel wants another.

There's no way to take the conflicts out of work. As a matter of fact, conflicts are stimulating. Fights are stimulating. Differences of opinion, if they are between people who basically see the same thing, are much more exhilarating than no conflicts. There's an old corny saying in show business: When everything goes well the production is going to fail. That doesn't mean you've got to stir up fights. But there are producers who do stir up fights, who do set people against each other. I've heard them say, "When you're in trouble you're going to think faster and better." I don't mind conflict, and I like an argument. I like it in people. Sometimes you learn a lot.

**Question:** How do you set your priorities if you are both producer and director?

**Kazan:** They're always the same, and the obstacles are the same. If a producer is there, your obstacle is a good one. You try to convince him that your goals are more important. You have constant arguments. There's nothing wrong with it. We're arguing now about how many suits DeNiro should have. The producer just left, and he said to me, "Does he need fourteen suits? Doesn't he ever repeat?" So I said, "I'll try to cut out a couple." But I think to myself, well, if he needs fourteen suits, he'd better have them. But it's a tiny point. Does he need this set? Do we need all this? So I cut something. He's blocking you in a way, but he's helping also. Don't

try to take the conflict out of anything. Whenever there's a group that makes something, as the Group Theater used to, as soon as the conflicts go out of it, it means indifference. The number one enemy of art is indifference, or not caring a lot. When you say, "What the shit, it's only a picture," don't do it. Go home.

**Question:** Do you think that the more personal you get in your films, the more you lose your dramatic objectivity?

**Kazan:** I guess so. I don't give a damn, though.

**Question:** For whom do you make your films?

**Kazan:** The unwritten premise of every director, in my opinion, is this: If it moves me, it's going to move a lot of other people. Sometimes a lot of other people; sometimes a few other people. If you finally are saying, whom do you make them for, you make them for yourself. I think that's the same reason painters paint.

**Question:** How do you approach a film like *The Last Tycoon*? Do you prepare an elaborate shooting script?

**Kazan:** If you do that there's no use getting good actors because there's no surprise. If you're going to squeeze them into a straight jacket of that form, I think you should get marionettes. I keep a notebook in which I try to describe every character. I try to get at what the essence of each part is and how that part serves the whole. And as I make these notes, I begin to find the moments that are significant, particularly the climax. I don't want to go into *The Last Tycoon*, but I made a big fat notebook for it because there are so many characters and it's so involved. I've got to be very clear about these characters, otherwise they'll run away with me. When I begin to direct a scene I know what I want out of the scene, and I know what each character is supposed to contribute.

**Question:** Do you work out camera movements with your cameraman?



**Kazan:** I arrange a scene with the camera in mind. I sometimes say to the cameraman in the morning, "Take this wall out; I'm going to shoot this way." I'm not a great guy for moving the camera. I nail it down a lot. I don't like it when it moves too much. I never get on a crane. I don't dolly much. I love a set thing because you're not aware of the camera. As for close-ups, I think they're most useful when you're recording a change, when you want to see the effect of something on a character.

**Question:** Do you leave the composition of a close-up to your cameraman?

**Kazan:** Hell, no. I don't leave anything to anybody. I don't mean to be mean about it, but I think everything tells a story. Hitchcock's the best example. The way he does close-ups is fantastic. In *The Last Tycoon*, I've tried to make DeNiro look like a very sensitive person. You've seen what he usually plays. I used a still camera, and I found out that when I got up high his cheeks sunk in a little bit, and he looked more drawn, more ascetic. That's something good for me to know. So I try in certain scenes to go up a little bit higher.

**Question:** Do you keep a journal on your filmmaking?

**Kazan:** Yes, I try to. I keep a diary, and every morning when I go in I write for ten or fifteen minutes, unless somebody grabs me right away. I write on whatever happened the day before and whatever feelings I have. The first entry in my diary of *The Last Tycoon* is a letter I sent to Sam Spiegel dubious about doing the picture. When I read the script again I realized there was more in it, that there was a lot I had missed. I'd have to bring that out clearly, and I began to like the script better.

**Question:** What made you take the long trip from Broadway to Hollywood back in 1944?

**Kazan:** I was just anxious to make films. For a while I was the fair-haired boy of Broadway, and I got a lot of offers from Warner Bros. and Metro and Fox. I liked the producer at Fox best, and I commit-

ted myself. But it was much harder to get into films then than it is now. There is a big road to films now called television. A lot of film directors—Arthur Penn, Marty Ritt, John Frankenheimer—came out of television. Television is sort of a training ground, although it's a monster training ground for a little job. But back then it was very hard to get into film, so I just grabbed that opportunity because I wanted to make films.

**Question:** You already had a strong interest in films?

**Kazan:** The first artist I admired in my life was Sergei Eisenstein. The second man I admired was Alexander Dovzhenko and a picture called *Air City* (*Aerograd*). These men were like idols, and you are affected by your idols, as I was by Renoir's films. So, I became a film director out of admiration, out of wanting to be like that—hero worship. I think it's the most wonderful art in the world.

**Question:** You did *Pinky* while at Fox in the late forties, a fairly bold picture on blacks. Do you have any regard for it these days?

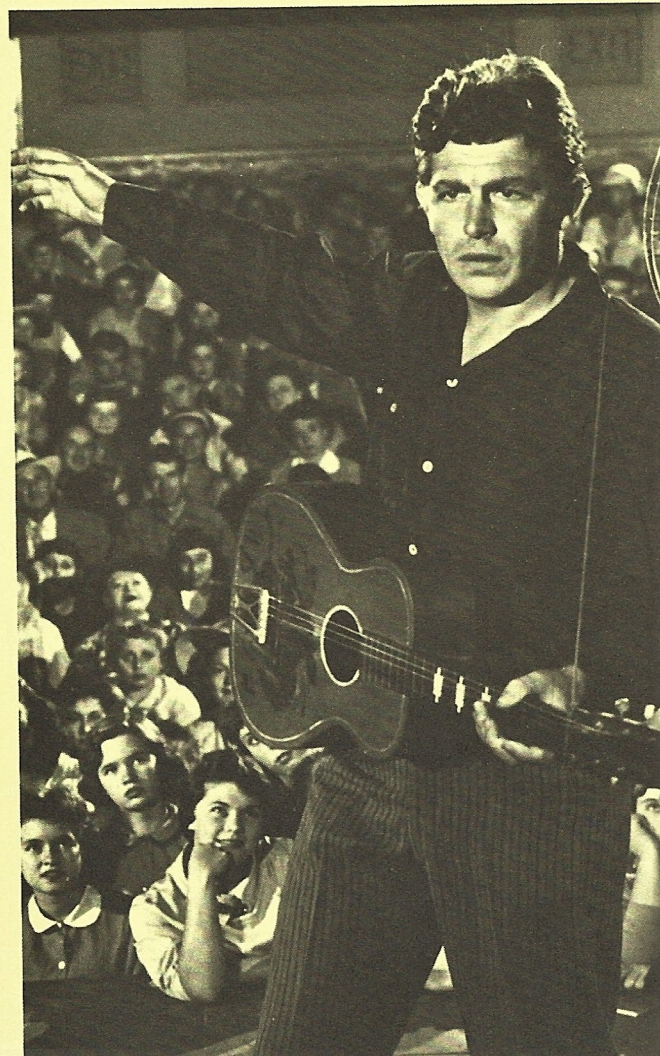
**Kazan:** I'm not too proud of that picture. It's the first time "nigger" was said on the screen, but I think it was a conventional picture. I think there were a lot of clichés in it. I took it over from Jack Ford, and I didn't work on the script. All I think I should do is tell my *own* story. That's why instead of getting broader and more catholic, I think I'm getting narrower. But *Baby Doll* is the picture in which I think I did the black characters best. They were old retainers on a broken-down plantation, but they laughed at the whites. The laughter was scornful. Affectionate to a certain extent but scornful. But I don't think I've ever done a black person the way a black person can do a black person. I have great sympathy, but I don't think it's possible for me.

**Question:** You say that television is a training ground for directors in films. But there is a big difference between the television I see and your movies. For instance, framing in television is very

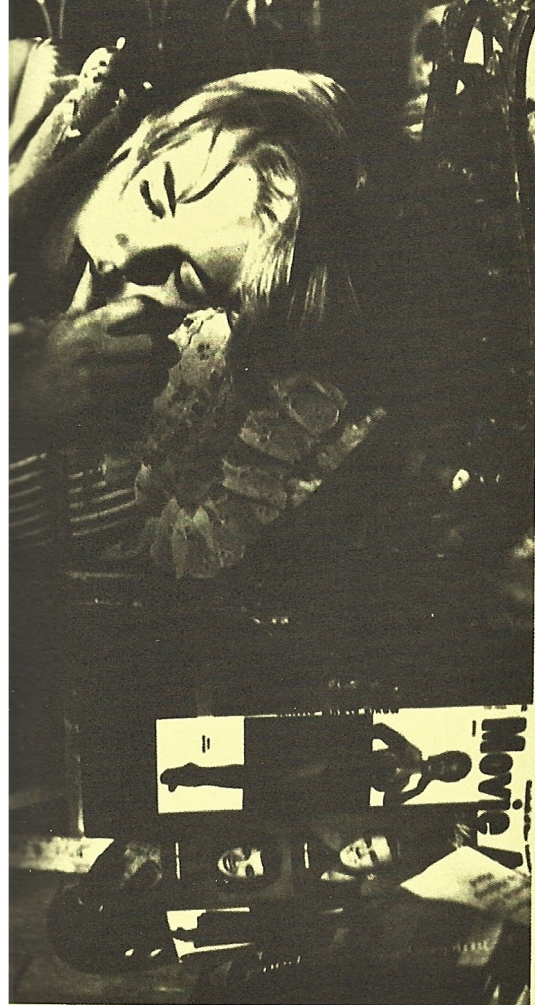




*Patricia Joyce, James Woods in The Visitors. "Nobody would put up money—I finally borrowed it from a bank...and did the film with a crew of four."*







Carroll Baker in *Baby Doll*—the screenplay by Tennessee Williams was based on two of his one-act plays.

shallow. But you have action going on three or more different planes.

**Kazan:** That's correct. I believe that's the essence of movie composition. In a movie a long shot is one of the greatest forms of expression. The other great form is a close-up. A medium shot is valuable but often literal. But a long shot often can achieve poetry. In a close shot the camera works more like a microscope; it is a penetrating device. But when you have a twenty-five-inch screen and a long shot, it's just a blur back there often; it doesn't mean anything. I think the best-directed shows on television are football and baseball games. In a football game you see a play, you see it in slow motion again, you see the coaches looking worried. When someone makes a great play you see a close-up. It's a fantastic piece of direction.

**Question:** How has filmmaking changed for you since those early days at Fox?

**Kazan:** The key word in art—it's an ugly word but

it's a necessary word—is power, your own power. Power to say, "I'm going to bend you to my will." However you disguise it, you're gripping someone's throat. You're saying, "My dear, this is the way it's going to be." Whenever anybody blocks that, you have less power. So for me I would say that things have gotten better, and they're going to get better yet.

I had trouble with California financially because *America, America* lost a fortune; *The Arrangement* lost a fortune. I would say most of my films, except *Splendor in the Grass*, *On the Waterfront*, and *East of Eden*, lost money. The studios finally said, "If you leave him alone he's liable to lose you a bundle." So power interests me very much. The director with the greatest power in the world is Bergman, because he makes his films with few people and he makes them with few sets. But read *Bergman on Bergman* and see how even he has to practically crawl to someone in Stockholm and say, "What about this project? I want to make this project. I'll make you two comedies after I do that. Will that make it all right?"

You are dealing with power in filmmaking, even with a low budget. I made *The Visitors* for \$165,000. *The Last Tycoon* costs \$39,000 a day. Nobody would put up money for *The Visitors*. I finally borrowed the money from a bank, hocked some stuff, made an arrangement with United Artists, and did the film with a crew of four. I did the properties. When there was a pancake-eating scene, my son cooked the pancakes. He kept the books. I made the film this way because I did not want to be terrorized by money. I went to see Godard shoot *A Woman Is a Woman* in a room where there was barely space to walk around in. He made that film for very little. When you reduce your costs you gain some power.

**Question:** What happened to *The Visitors*?

**Kazan:** You're touching on a very sore spot with me because United Artists killed the picture. They opened it for nine days in New York, and it got a wonderful notice in *The New York Times*, terrible notices everywhere else. But they didn't promote it. They just put it away. I'm now trying to buy the

Andy Griffith in *A Face in the Crowd*. "We were satirizing the whole field of public communications."



*Jack Palance in Panic in the Streets.*  
“There is talk in it, but really the story is all told by pictures.”

picture because it meant a lot to me. It's imperfect but it has value. I'm still very angry. I think United Artists did an inhuman act.

**Question:** The problem with a personal film like *The Visitors*, of course, is getting around the distribution system.

**Kazan:** The hope of directors like me is to start our own distribution outfit. Francis Coppola is trying to do that now on a large scale. I own *Baby Doll* and *A Face in the Crowd*, and I have someone who books these in colleges. The rights to *America, America* will revert to me, and I'll do the same thing. I'm trying to create another source of distribution rather than to the big theaters. The theaters are never going to show *Wild River*, though I think that it's an unusual picture and that the last half of it is wonderful.

**Question:** Why won't they show it?

**Kazan:** Because they don't make any money from it. Minimum advertising in *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, and *The Village Voice*, gets up into \$25,000. Nobody's going to risk \$25,000 unless they think it's going to come back. The record shows them that they won't get it back.

**Question:** You said *A Face in the Crowd* lost money. What sort of response did it get when it opened?

**Kazan:** I think it received better than average. I think it's a hell of a good film myself, with all its faults. I think it says a lot, anticipates a lot. Nora Sayre said in *The New York Times* last winter that it anticipated a lot of the Watergate hearings. I wish she could have reviewed it at the time. But we didn't do too well with it. A lot of my films didn't. *America, America* started like a house afire in New York City and died everywhere else. Now it's played nine times a year in Paris. In Athens it's constantly playing. In Germany it's played all the time. *Wild River* was an absolute financial disaster. I heard last year that when Twentieth Century-Fox cleaned house they burned a lot of negatives, and

among them the negative of that picture. Imagine how I feel.

**Question:** Your wife's movie, *Wanda*, also suffered at the box office. Is Barbara Loden now planning anymore films?

**Kazan:** I think that *Wanda* is a marvelous picture. It's completely honest. My wife is now getting ready to make another picture on the same small scale. *Wanda* got excellent notices, but it died everywhere. What does Barbara feel? She feels hurt. She doesn't get any offers. She's been trying to get backing on her new picture for a year and a half. Something's wrong, and I don't know what to do about it.

**Question:** Some of your films, of course, have been commercial successes. Have you been able to isolate a common element to explain the success?

**Kazan:** I think so. I think they're films that are recognizable to audiences emphatically. In other words, they say, "There's a piece of me." *Splendor in the Grass* was one of my successful films. It's family life in a small town. Everybody knows people like that, and they respond immediately, simply. But when the message is gritty, when the message is disturbing, I don't know if people want to be disturbed. Then you can have films in which the core is moving to an audience, like *On the Waterfront*. There it was the problem of conscience which Brando had. But it was also very exciting, in terms of physical conflict, in terms of danger.

Somebody said that the three things people respond to are death, money, and sex. I don't know if any of that is true, but I think people certainly respond to things that worry them in their own lives. I think audiences are much smarter in the intuitive sense than filmmakers in the big studios know. I think they're anxious to see their own lives reflected and to work out through the behavior of other people their own problems. I think if you can get that tie, you will have a film that will be popular. I don't use the word "successful." I say "popular." I think people like to be scared—*Jaws*. And I

*Jeanne Crain, Ethel Barrymore in Pinky, one of the first films to deal with racial problems.*





think people like to be reassured. It has something to do with the relationship between an audience and a film.

I don't know why anybody should go see *The Last Tycoon*—but don't quote me. I hope to make it so they will. I hope to make it so they'll see a talented guy under the stress of business and everything else. They'll watch him and say, "Yes, I have talent, I have feeling, and I have known that stress." I'm trying to direct it so it'll relate to the experience of the audience.

**Question:** Would you say that a successful film as opposed perhaps to a popular film hinges to a large extent on structure?

**Kazan:** I'm a great believer in structure, though many excellent films are unstructured. I believe in telling a continuous story, in coming to two or three climaxes, each of which changes the relationships in the next section. That doesn't mean that episodic films like *8½* are bad. I thought it was a masterpiece, and it's one of my favorite films. But I personally believe in storytelling and structure and tension.

**Question:** You think in movements as opposed to acts?

**Kazan:** No, in inner acts as opposed to movements, inner acts which cause behavior. If you think of people as changing things, as dynamic rather than static, you have to have structure. Godard, for example, shows people in a static state. I don't see life that way.

**Question:** Your concern for structure then means a close attention to editing?

**Kazan:** I think editing is part of directing. That's why I don't like it when editors get the same credit that directors do. I think a director should do absolutely everything. I think the sets are his. The costumes are his. The editing is his. I'm a believer in the dominance of one person who has a vision.

**Question:** Your films often contain recurring de-



## Films Directed by Kazan

*Pie in the Sky* (short), with Ralph Steiner, Irving Lerner—1934  
*The People of the Cumberland* (documentary short)—Frontier Films—1937  
*It's Up to You* (documentary feature) U.S. Department of Agriculture—1941  
*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1945  
*Sea of Grass*—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—1947  
*Boomerang!*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1947

*Gentleman's Agreement*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1947  
*Pinky*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1949  
*Panic in the Streets*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1950  
*A Streetcar Named Desire*—Warner Bros.—1952  
*Viva Zapata!*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1952  
*Man on a Tightrope*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1952  
*On the Waterfront*—Columbia—1954  
*East of Eden*\*—Warner Bros.—1955 (Screenplay with Tennessee Williams)  
*Baby Doll*\*—Warner Bros.—1956

*A Face in the Crowd*\*—Warner Bros.—1957  
*Wild River*\*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1960  
*Splendor in the Grass*\*—Warner Bros.—1961  
*America, America*\*—Warner Bros.—1964 (Adapted screenplay from his novel)  
*The Arrangement*\*—Warner Bros.—1969 (Adapted screenplay from his novel)  
*The Visitors*\*—United Artists—1972  
*The Last Tycoon*—Paramount Pictures—1976  
 \*also produced

vices or symbols—the jacket in *On the Waterfront*, the gift of shoes at the beginning and end of *America, America*.

**Kazan:** I'm given to symbols. For example, water is a recurring image in my pictures. I constantly feel something about water. There's always a hydrant spouting water or a lake or the sea. It happens again in *The Last Tycoon*. I am aware of repeated symbols. I don't know if it's good or bad. Sometimes after a film I think, "I wish I hadn't been so obvious."

**Question:** You're filming *The Last Tycoon* here on the coast. As a New Yorker who loves the streets and the pace, do you find yourself less stimulated here? In other words, do you work better in New York?

**Kazan:** I think the greatest loss you people have out here is that there's fewer stimuli from the place where you work to the place where you live. In New York City I live on 68th Street and I write on 54th Street in a little office. There are always five, ten, fifteen things I see on the way down that I can't forget. Recently, I was riding on a train to visit my mother in Rye, New York, and I saw a twelve-year-old girl with a Vivaldi concerto spread out on her lap. She was moving her hands as if she were at the piano. Now where could I possibly see that in Los Angeles?

But here, where I'm supposedly successful, I never see a goddamn thing. I get up in the morning. I ride in the car that the studio provides to Paramount Studios. On the ride down I'm semiconscious. I don't see anything because I'm thinking about what I'm going to do. I get to the studio and I'm in an office, which is a protected environment. It's like a hiatus in my life. I'm a fellow who gets a lot from what he sees around him. But I feel terribly isolated here. I feel de-natured here. When I made pictures in New York, I always got something. I used to walk around the streets to get something. I'm not hostile to this neighborhood, but I'm a New Yorker. I always will be. New York is a battleground, a vicious, dangerous, dirty, mixed-up but

terrific place, and everything about it I love.

**Question:** What led you to switch from filmmaking to novel-writing?

**Kazan:** It's very personal. My first wife died. We were very, very close, and I decided I would stop everything and just leave the country for a while. Re-find myself, whatever the hell the word is. I had been making a film every year and a play every year for a long time, and it was hard work. I began to write some notes, and that slowly began to develop into a book called *The Arrangement*.

I found myself saying, "I'm not in sympathy with the work of Tennessee Williams, although I love him and I think he's a wonderful writer. And I'm not in sympathy with the point of view of Arthur Miller, although I love him personally and I like his work. And I'm not in sympathy with Bill Inge. I've got to start viewing things as I do, and when I go back to films I want to make films that in some way or another expresses my opinion." The next film I'm going to make, I hope, will be a follow-up on *America, America* which is about what happened to my uncle after he got to this country. I want to make more personal films.

**Question:** What do you look for when you consider doing a film?

**Kazan:** I don't move unless I have some empathy with the basic theme. In some way the channel of the film should also be in my own life. I start with an instinct. With *East of Eden* I said, "I don't know why it is but the last ninety pages of Steinbeck's book turn me on." It's really the story of my father and me, and I didn't realize it for a long time. When Paul Osborn and I began to work on the screenplay, I realized that it's just the way I was. I was always the bad boy, but I thought I was the good boy. In some subtle or not-so-subtle way every film is autobiographical. A thing in my life is expressed by the essence of the film. Then I know it experientially, not just mentally. I've got to feel that it's in some way about me, some way about my struggles, some way about my pain, my hopes. ❧



the commercial is on the tube, one wouldn't dare go to the refrigerator for a snack...unless, perhaps, it is for a 7-Up.

Abel says that he and his staff approach a roll of unexposed negative as though it were a stretch of virgin canvas. They "paint" directly onto the film with light, using variations of front- and rear-projection, slit-scan, "streaking" (akin to the penlight sculptures of Saul Bass), multiple image superimpositions, bipack mattes, animation, and so on.

"Expediency is a very important aspect of what we do," he admits. Since nearly all of their work is done with direct (nonreflected) light, they have to shoot in dark rooms, allowing them no frame of reference; so they program their slit-scan and other operations into a computer which does the routine work. "The computer we see as a nondeterrent to imagination," Abel says. It liberates the artist from drudgery. Owing to the technological nature of Abel's work, he has staffed his company not only with filmmakers but also with experts in light and optics, mathematicians and physicists.

He is well aware of the irony inherent in making "artistic" TV commercials. But "the wonderful thing about them is that you're creating an illusion to begin with; you're appealing to the fantasy part of people's lives, so why not do it visually, fantastically." He has an enormous respect for the Linwood Duns and Albert Whitlocks of feature film effects, but he feels they've been too limited by the fabrication of a semblance of reality, whereas the new breed of effects man is more attuned to fantasy. Not surprisingly, Abel's favorite "effects" films are things like *The Wizard of Oz* and the animated features of Disney.

Douglas Trumbull is one of several effects artists and technicians now experimenting with a revolutionary piece of hardware called the Electronic Composite Photography/Image Modification System, or ECP/IMS for short. A computerized image transformation machine, the ECP/IMS promises to make the optical printer all but obsolete, for it can do everything the printer can and much, much more.

Trademarked Magicam, Technimatte, Image-matte, and Magicmatte, the ECP/IMS's have so far been limited to videotape use for television. But industry insiders say that its adaptation to film use is close at hand. The systems can perform remarkable tricks. For example, virtually anything—from Grand Central Station to the craters of the moon—can be constructed in miniature and used as a "set" for the drama. The computer composites live action "in" and "around" the model with the scaled-down environment itself.

Merely by programming a computer, filmmakers will be able to fashion effects never dreamed of by optical printer virtuosos. An actor's face can be made to blush or pale without changing anything else in the image; continuity errors can be corrected merely by removing or inserting this or that object; shadows can be added or taken out; clouds

can be introduced into a cloudless sky; accidental anachronisms in period pictures—like telephone poles or airplanes—can be deleted from view; objects can be frozen while everything else moves; black-and-white can appear in the same shot with color; even mortal men can be shown walking on water. Obviously the ECP/IMS promises a new age in special effects. The possibilities are limitless—and staggering.

As Linwood Dunn has said, "Nothing is impossible" for the effects man; the word itself is foreign to his vocabulary. "It's only a matter of time and money—together with a good measure of perseverance." There may be something childlike in the effects man's obsession with magic, monsters, mayhem, and fantasy. But no one, not even his analyst, would dare accuse him of delusions of grandeur. ■

James M. Martin is a free-lance writer based in California.



Actor Grant Williams and hostile cat in *The Incredible Shrinking Man*.



# My Son

the  
Movie Star

Aljean Harmetz

Hesitantly, I hold out my son's work permit. No one takes it from me. I stuff the paper back into my pocket. I have spent fifteen years on movie sets but today I am—with sudden embarrassment—an amateur.

My generation wanted to be movie stars with a desperate ferocity. The process began at birth when we were named for Shirley Temple or Jackie Cooper. We were sent to dancing school and our hair—however inappropriately—was teased into corkscrew curls. What our parents wanted for us became, soon enough, what we wanted for ourselves—money, fame, and, most of all, power. The unluckiest of us were those whose parents moved beyond daydreams. The monstrous, golden-haired child actor played by Jackie Earle Haley in *Day of the Locust* is no more than an exaggeration or two from reality.

It is 8:30 A.M. on a baseball diamond at the northwest end of the San Fernando Valley. It is not a real baseball diamond, of course. The outfield is painted green every three or four days, and the backstop is thirty-six feet high in order to make the children who are playing on the field seem even smaller. Jackie Earle Haley, fourteen years old, is standing in center field. For Haley, *Day of the Locust* was a lucky break. It almost doubled his salary. Among the other children on the diamond is Kenny Pollack, ten years old, shortstop for the league-winning Pirates of Mission Hills. Also among them is Tatum O'Neal, eleven years old, the first genuine child movie star in a decade. Kenny Pollack is being paid \$25 a day. Tatum O'Neal is being paid \$7,000 a day.

Dressed in a white Yankee uniform with black pinstripes, my son Dan stands behind the dugout fence and waits. In the next hour, he looks at my watch a dozen times. It is hard to understand what happens to time on movie sets, how it thickens and slows to a sour trickle. Except as a visitor, Dan knows nothing of movie sets at all. This is his first—and probably his last—day as an actor.

By 9:30, director Michael Ritchie is impatiently pacing up and down the first base line. Ritchie is immensely tall. He towers among the children like a giraffe. The analogy seems even more accurate because of the thirty-seven-year-old director's

awkwardly coltish way of walking and tilting his head. He seems all legs and boyish sweetness. The films he makes belie the man. They deal—in a distinct, flat, almost documentary fashion—with the questions of success and failure in an Olympic race, a political contest, a beauty contest, and a Little League championship game.

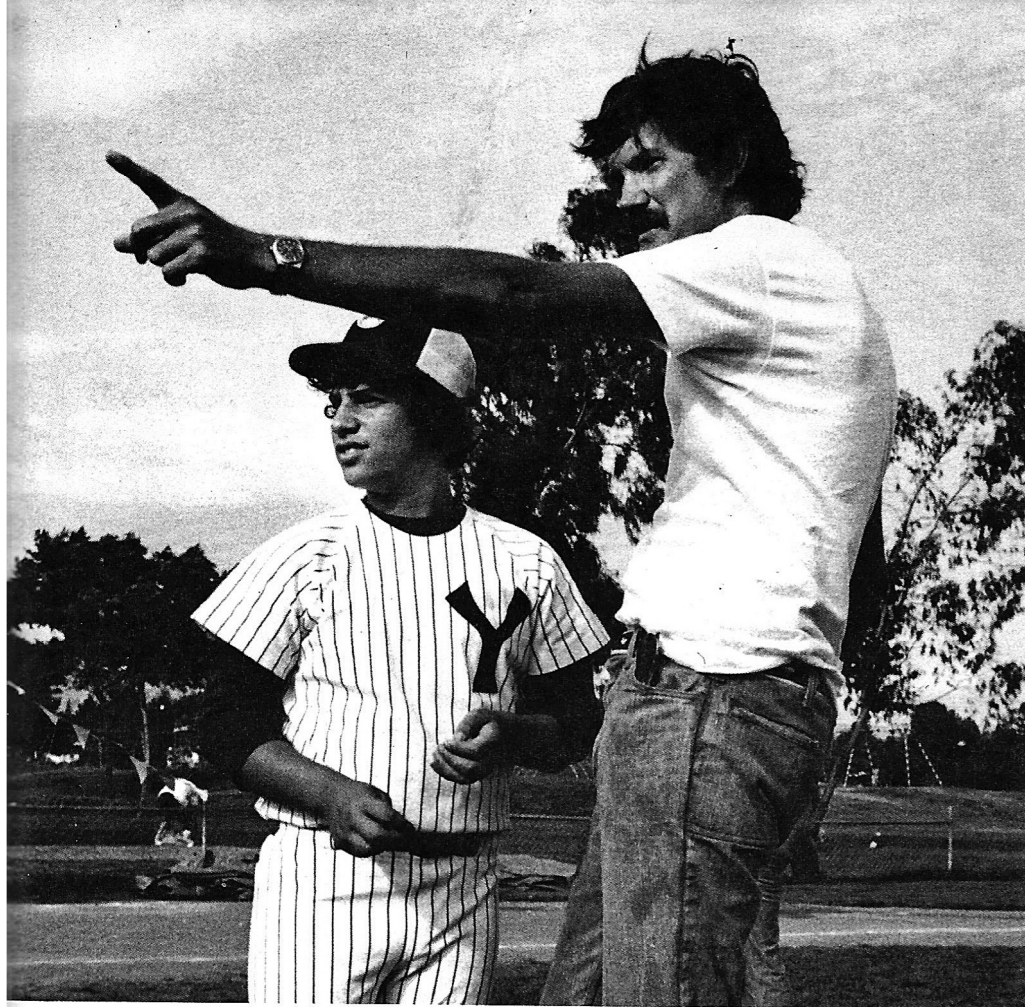
"Michael is obsessed with humiliation and exhilaration," says his production designer Polly Platt. His *Downhill Racer* wins and, in the moment of victory, understands the possibility of losing next time. Robert Redford in Ritchie's *The Candidate* becomes a U.S. Senator and confronts only his own emptiness. Ritchie's pretty, intelligent heroine in *Smile* salvages—by losing—the integrity she was willing to give away in order to win. "The critics are beginning to say that I'm making the same film over and over again," Ritchie says. "No one said that of John Ford." The tinge of anger in his voice reminds one of Polly Platt's comment that he is "a very nice man who, underneath, is an absolute tyrant."

Ritchie is not making the same picture over and over, although he is dealing with similar themes. In each of his films, including the one taking place on the baseball diamond, someone wins and someone loses in a ritualistic and clearly defined contest. What gives *Bad News Bears* an extra resonance is that the winning and losing is not confined to the baseball diamond or to the script. Tatum O'Neal is making \$350,000 plus eight percent of the net profits of *Bad News Bears*. Most of her teammates on the *Bears* are working for Screen Actors Guild minimum of \$604 per week. And they were chosen out of nearly 1,500 children who would have liked—or whose parents would have liked them—to be in the movies.

Tatum is being paid well over a quarter of a million dollars because Paramount Pictures and producer Stanley Jaffe are convinced that audiences will pay to watch her throw a baseball. (Actually, audiences will not see her throw the ball very often. As a pitcher, she has little skill, and she has been provided with two doubles, both boys, both wearing a shoulder-length fall of blonde hair. With the hairpiece, one of the boys looks amazingly like her.) The fact that her father is Ryan O'Neal;

**As a pitcher, Tatum shows little skill. She has been provided with two doubles, both boys.**

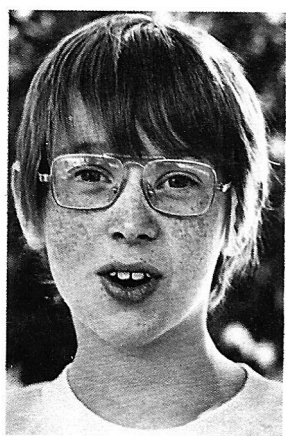
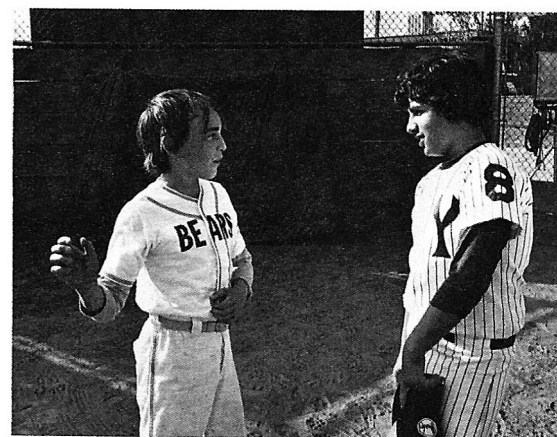




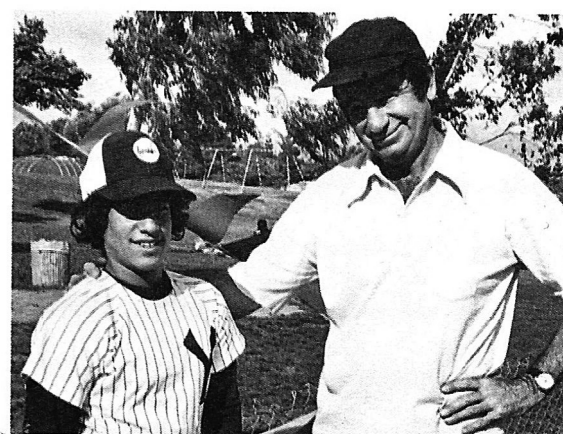
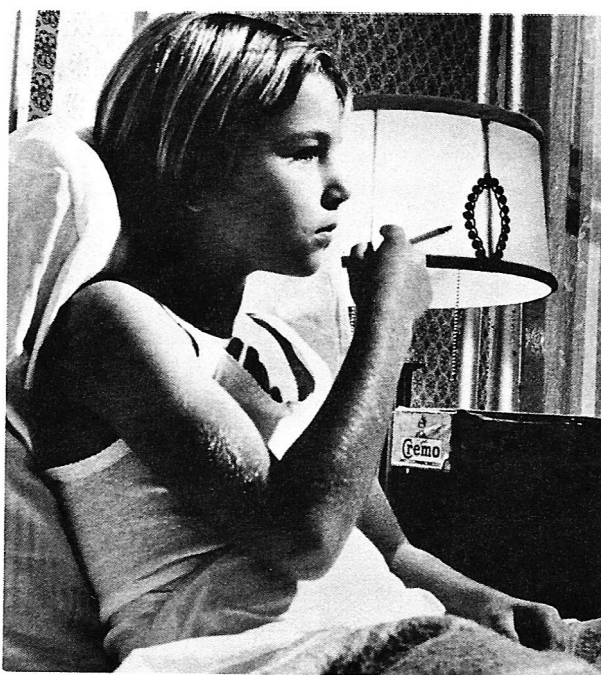
*Above: "Stick with me, kid. I'll make you a star." Bad News Bears director Michael Ritchie with Daniel Harmetz, the author's son.*

*Below: Tatum O'Neal. Her precocious success in Paper Moon netted her a cool \$350,000-plus for her role in Bad News Bears.*

*A few words from a star. Jackie Earle Haley (top) talks with Danny. Haley appalled audiences as the monstrous child actor (center) in Day of the Locust.*



*One of a new generation of child stars, Alfred Lutter first appeared in Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore.*



*Danny pals around with the coach of the Bears, Walter Matthau.*



**"The Bears play ineptly. One wonders how many of the children became actors because of that ineptness."**

that she played the tough-talking, cigarette-smoking role at the age of nine as her father's co-star in *Paper Moon*; that she won the Academy Award; that her tuxedo and shockingly short haircut made her look, at the Academy Awards ceremony, similar to and only slightly more wholesome than Joel Grey in *Cabaret*; and that her "sophistication" heavily reported have blended to make her a star.

Most of the other children seem uneasy with her. For the first few weeks they regarded her with awe tinged with envy. "Big deal—she was in one movie, and a fifty-dollar statue makes her a star." At the beginning, she seemed equally uneasy with them. Now she picks her spots to be friendly—throwing her arms around the mother of one of her teammates, playing chess with Alfred Lutter on the grass. But she has a sharp tongue and taunts some of the other children by calling them "fatty" and "squirt." Walter Matthau, her co-star, has lost his temper only once. Unceasingly kind and patient with the children, he blew up when Tatum kept him waiting for fifteen minutes.

Besides Tatum, the Bears include only two other readily recognizable actors: Alfred Lutter, who played Ellen Burstyn's son in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, and Jackie Haley. And neither of them was recognizable a year ago. *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* was Lutter's first part, and Haley, who began as the voice of Dennis the Menace in a cartoon when he was six, was just another kid in television until his tormented, and tormenting, child actor role in *Day of the Locust*. The other ten Bears come from minor television roles, from commercials, from nowhere.

It is 10:30 now. My son is thirsty, but he will not leave the fence to look for a drinking fountain. Perhaps they will call him while he is gone. He cannot be convinced that it will be hours before he is needed.

Ritchie is desperate. On the diamond he is creating the final—the championship—game between the Bears and the Yankees. And the Bears are not

cooperating. "Bears," he shouts, "we need two more outs." To the Yankee on second base, he adds, "Under no circumstances, go home. If there's a hit, stop at third. Stop at third!" It has been two hours, and the Bears seem unable to get anyone out. With the exception of Jackie Haley, who throws hard and fields well, the Bears play ineptly. One might even wonder how many of the children chose to become actors because of that ineptness.

The Bears—in their gold uniforms with a broken Liberty Bell stamped on the back—are misfits. The Yankees are winners. The Bears are sponsored by Chico's Bail Bonds. The Yankees in their pinstripes are sponsored by Denny's. It is a typically tart Ritchie joke. Twelve of the Yankees come from winning Little League teams in Northridge and Mission Hills. The thirteenth is actor Brandon Cruz who made his debut at the age of six as Eddie in "The Courtship of Eddie's Father."

At lunch and during the endless moments when cameras are being moved or reloaded, the Yankees—minus Brandon—stay together. They are in this hot green park for two or three weeks, but they are not here to act. They have come to play baseball, and they are proud of their skill. They find it almost impossible to perform properly when Michael Ritchie tells them to strike out, to drop a fly ball, to throw wildly to second base.

The differences between the Yankees and the Bears are instructive for anyone who wants to make his son into a movie actor. The Yankees are uniform. The Bears are noticeable in a provocative, sometimes almost eccentric, way. Eight-year-old George Gonzales was signed up by an agent for commercials when he was five. "My dad's a gardener," says George's mother. "He used to take George with him, and the people he worked for would say, 'George is such a character. Why don't you see if you can get him into commercials?' So we did."

Chris Barnes was seven when he was signed. "Everyone used to say, 'He's funny. Why don't you do something with him?'" So we did something with him. I have seven children, and I had to take three others along the day I went to the agent, and she picked out Chris." For Erin Blunt's mother, "it was kind of like a Cinderella story. When Erin was six, I went to pick up my thirteen-year-old daughter at modeling school. The director of the school saw Erin and said, 'He's awfully cute. Could I submit him for a commercial?' The commercial was for Space Food Sticks. He got the job and made \$3,000."

These pleasant women are not classic stage mothers as they sit under the trees day after day knitting, crocheting, and making needlepoint coasters for gifts. Some of them are not stage mothers at all. Gary Lee Cavagnaro's mother happened to work in a shopping plaza in Dallas where interviews were being held as a last attempt to cast the grotesquely overweight catcher of the Bears.

"We had seen five hundred fat kids," says

*Danny Harmetz poses with two Bear players. Harmetz sees his future as a pro bowler.*





Ritchie, "and we were just about to write the part out because fat kids don't have the effusive personality necessary for acting." Gary is enormously fat and enormously appealing with his stomach jutting over his uniform belt and with a pair of crooked front teeth. "They made me eat ten candy bars and three ham sandwiches at my interview," states Gary. "Then everybody went to lunch. I thought they were through with me so I had a cheeseburger and french fries. Then they called me back after lunch and made me eat more sandwiches and five more candy bars." Sweating in the hot sun, Gary dreams now of the possibility of becoming an actor, unaware—at twelve—of the roadblocks in his way. He has already gone for an interview for a second film, he says, and speaks with a certain pride of having been "discovered."

The Yankees do not dream of being actors.

**E**arly in his career Ritchie worked with the Maysles Brothers making documentaries. Among the directors he most admires is Ken Loach (*Kes*) whose fictional films lack the sheen and gloss of fiction. The boys Ritchie chose as Yankees were already winners, champions of their leagues. They were chosen for their skill, their "Nordic good looks," and a touch of arrogance. "In my concept," says Ritchie, "the Yankees were winners, champions, arrogant, and relatively humorless. All the time we've been here, I've never seen any of the Yankees smile."

It is because Ritchie has never seen any of the Yankees smile that my son and I are here today. Ritchie had assumed that the two small speaking parts on the Yankees would be given to members of the team. "Then I put one boy in a scene with Brandon Cruz in the dugout. He didn't have to speak, but he was still so self-conscious he ruined the scene. It quickly became clear that none of the Yankees could handle a speaking part."

Paramount had put an ad in *Variety* asking for husky nine- to twelve-year-old boys who were skilled at playing baseball. I had answered it partly out of a reporter's curiosity, partly—to be honest—out of remembered fantasy from my childhood. Dan had not gotten the part, but they had told him he might be called back "to play a little baseball." When the actor chosen to taunt Jackie Haley had rejected the role as "too small," Dan had been asked to read for it.

"At this age," says Ritchie, "kids are playing themselves. To play someone other than yourself takes a maturity which comes with age. We looked at a lot of kids with theater experience in Dallas, and they were just awful." To the improvisation Ritchie set him, Dan brought seven years of real T-Ball and Little League experience in needling opposing players. He had the right touch of arrogance, but he could also smile. And, luckiest of all, he was a good physical match for David Lazarus,


the boy already chosen to play the other Yankee speaking part.

Dan and David Lazarus quickly strike up an acquaintanceship. They are the outsiders, here only for a day. For David, it is not the only day he will spend on movie sets. He is committed to the interviews, the auditions, the rejections. He tried out for the role of the Yankee pitcher and lost to Brandon Cruz. Yet, says Ritchie, Dan does "every bit as good as David Lazarus" when they are finally called to do their scene.

The words are nice to hear, but they do not rebuild my fantasies. I would not want a child of mine to be an actor. The first tentacles of corruption are apparent in Gary Cavagnaro's surliness when he is asked to report to the set; in Chris Barnes's pretending to be a year younger than he really is during his first interview with Ritchie, because "I didn't know how old you wanted me to be"; in Dan's agony during his first interview when he is asked the name of his favorite sport. "I told them bowling. They probably wanted me to say baseball. Shall I tell them baseball if they ask me again?" I assure him that he is not, under any circumstances, to lie. Oddly, honesty pays off during his audition with Ritchie, since Ritchie has been annoyed by the dozens of children coached by their mothers to tell him how much they love baseball.

If I did want Dan to be an actor, I would be disappointed. At twelve, he looks as if he is twelve. With the exception of one boy who is meant to be in early adolescence, there is not one actor on the Bears who looks his age. At eight, George Gonzales looks six. At nine, Jaime Escobedo hardly seems to have arrived at his seventh birthday. Delayed puberty is the child actor's best friend. Older children can understand more quickly, memorize lines with less trouble, speak more clearly, follow directions more carefully. At thirteen, Brandon Cruz looks barely eleven, but his perceptions are those of a thirteen-year-old.

His mother, Edwina Cruz, sits in a webbed lawn chair. She has four children, and her ten-year-old is a real all-star Little League pitcher. She watches Brandon as he walks to the mound to pitch. Would she do it again? "Yes. Maybe. I don't know. Brandon was a public person so early. At six. A year later he was mobbed in Canada. Eventually, he just wanted to be a private person."

At 6 P.M. Dan is dismissed. He returns his Yankee uniform and his cleats. At 9, exhausted from the heat and the uncertainties of the day, he falls asleep in front of the TV set. He sleeps on the living room couch until morning. By 10 A.M. he has departed for the bowling alley and his own fantasies of making a living as a professional bowler. Twenty-five miles away, the Bears and the Yankees go into the sixth inning of their game. 

**"The Yankees are winners, champions. All my time here, I have never seen one of them smile."**

Aljean Harmetz, who writes frequently on film, is at work on a book of the making of the MGM movie *The Wizard of Oz* to be published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1977.

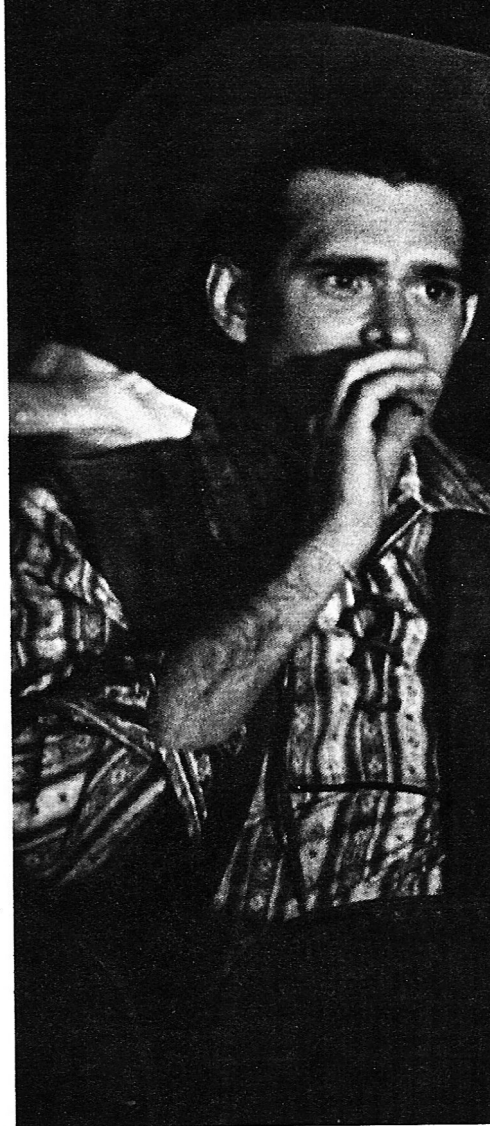


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# West Out West

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A Reminiscence of Nathanael West  
in the Land of the Locust



## Garson Kanin

"Every masterpiece," said Thornton Wilder, "was written this morning."

The impact and immediacy of the film version of *The Day of the Locust*, produced thirty-six years after the publication of the book, came as no surprise to the many who have long regarded this work by Nathanael West as an American classic. It is sometimes referred to as "a minor classic," but can a classic be minor?

In Hollywood, in the summer of 1938, Nathanael West and I were co-slaves in the B-picture department of the RKO studios on Gower Street. I was a director with no credits; he, a writer with a glowing literary reputation, but with screen credits that were actually debits.

He was writing a screenplay entitled "Five Came Back" for John Farrow, who was not yet Mia's father.

My first glimpse of him was from a window of my third-floor office where Dalton Trumbo and I were working on "A Man to Remember."

I saw a tall, husky figure in shirt-sleeves, moving slowly, deliberately, weaving in and out about the



*The New York Times*





*Bo Hopkins, Karen Black, William Atherton in Day of the Locust.*

*In 1931, Nathanael West (left) was still two years away from Hollywood.*

gloomy, brown buildings on the lot. The frown on his forehead was as pronounced as his heavy black mustache. He appeared to be thinking—a rare sight in that time and place.

“New guy?” I asked.

“Who?”

“That one.”

(The studio was bankrupt, the program uncertain, every new face a threat.)

“Yeah,” said Dalton. “Take a good look. That’s a Real Writer. Not many of those around.”

“Name?”

“Pep West.”

“Pep?”

“Nathanael West.”

“Oh, *Miss Lonelyhearts*?”

“The same,” said Dalton. “Also *Balso Snell* and *A Cool Million*....and he’s only thirty-five. An

own-way man with a fantastic slant. What’s more, he knows how to construct a sentence.”

What impressed me even more than this was learning that West’s sister Laura was married to S. J. Perelman.

“Why ‘Pep’?” I asked.

“College humor. You know. ‘Pep’ because he’s the opposite of. He’s always been like that—gradual, careful, take-it-easy—as if he’s afraid of disturbing his own concentration.”

“What’s he doing *here*?”

“Same as us, kid. Earning an honest day’s pay.” We went back to work.

I saw Nathanael West daily from then on and noted that he usually walked from 12:00 to 1:00—his lunch hour—at a leisurely pace, continually cerebrating.

RKO employees did not, as a rule, wander about the lot on company time. We had all been chastened by a recent report direct from the office of Pandro S. Berman, head of production. The celebrated efficiency expert who had been brought in by the new administration had been at the studio for



Lee Tracy, Sterling Holloway in *Advice to the Lovelorn* (1934)—“a truncated, watered-down, hoked-up treatment” of *Miss Lonelyhearts*.



no more than a few hours when he burst into Berman's office and exulted, "I've got something already! A big hole to plug!"

"What is it?"

"I've just been through the whole Writers' Building. Every office. Twenty-eight writers—and you know how many of them were writing? *Three!*"

I had thought *Miss Lonelyhearts* an extraordinary book, perfect for screen adaptation, but when I tried to sell the idea to Berman and his staff, I was laughed out of his office. Didn't I know, f' Chrissake, that Zanuck had already made it at Twentieth with Lee Tracy? The title had been changed to *Advice to the Lovelorn*, and it had flopped. Ha, ha. Anyway, didn't I know about this West guy's troubles with *Harrison's Reports*? (My studio stock dropped ten points.)

*Harrison's Reports*, published in New York, was a powerful industry tip sheet. Berman sent me the issue in question (August 26, 1933) a few days later.

On the front page, E. G. Harrison, its editor and publisher, had written:

"During the three years of my publishing *The Forecaster* I have read more than five hundred books, plays, or magazine stories. Among these have been some very dirty ones: William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, which was produced by Paramount, is one of them. Joy Blaine's *Wife to Hugo*, announced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer but not produced to this day as a result of the war this paper has carried on against it, is another. There are dozens of others. But never have I read anything to compare in vileness and vulgarity with Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* announced by Twentieth Century Pictures. It is so obscene that I am surprised that its publication should have been permitted, particularly because of its implications of degeneracy. It cannot be defended on the grounds of art; it has none. It is just low and vulgar, put out undoubtedly to appeal to moronic natures.

To cause the production of this picture to be abandoned I have mailed to every daily in the United States and to more than fifty newspaper associations a twelve-hundred-word synopsis with a letter calling their attention to the intention of Darryl F. Zanuck of Twentieth Century Pictures and of his ally, Joseph Schenck of United Artists, to make a picture out of this material, urging them, not only to protest to these, but also to send a letter either to Mr. Hugh S. Johnson, Administrator, or to Mr. Sol A. Rosenblatt, Deputy Administrator of the NRA, recommending that a provision be put into the Motion Picture Industry's code making block-booking and blind-selling an unfair method of competition. And there is no doubt in my mind many of them will heed this paper's recommendation...."

Elsewhere on the front page, was the following:

#### Subscribe to *The Forecaster*

"The production of *Miss Lonelyhearts* proves you cannot be too watchful as to the sort of material producers put into pictures....Darryl F. Zanuck for instance has been painted to us as a genius when it comes to producing pictures....If *Miss Lonelyhearts* is an example of what he is going to deliver, I pity the exhibitor who will place the safety of his investment in his hands. Send today—the exposé of this material alone has saved those of you who contemplated contracting Twentieth Century Pictures many times the amount of the subscription."

In the next week's issue, Harrison persisted, editorially:

"Unless discarded in its entirety and a brand new story written around the title...*Miss Lonelyhearts*...I may add that it is the lowest, vilest, filthiest book that I have ever read."

A few days later, Darryl F. Zanuck wrote to E. G. Harrison and said, in part:

"The scenario (of *Miss Lonelyhearts*) wholly conceived in the mind of Leonard Praskins is bright, sparkling, and harmless, full of humor



rather than pornographic.... It is typical of stories in which Mr. Lee Tracy has been appearing."

To which Harrison replied:

"You can do nothing to take the stench out of the material.... This is a plea to abandon the production."

West considered suing Harrison, but no grounds could be found.

I realized the extent to which the craven studio had knuckled under when I had a print sent over and ran it.

It turned out to be a truncated, watered-down, hoked-up treatment of West's novel. The major characters, as well as the narrative, had been "improved" out of recognition.

Whatever the film, the final product seen on the screen is the result of power, rather than talent. To write, one requires ability, practice, experience, discipline, craftsmanship, and passion; to rewrite, one needs only a blue pencil.

This explains, in part, Nathanael West's failure in Hollywood. He was—as his enduring work shows—an original and gifted fabulist. From 1933 to 1940, Republic, Columbia, Universal, RKO, and MGM employed him. If only they had employed his genius!

I wanted to meet him, perhaps to know him, but waited until I had read the two of his books that were unknown to me. They were nowhere available in Hollywood, and difficult to find even in New York. But in time, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* and *A Cool Million* became important parts of my literary experience.

At exactly noon one day, I went onto the lot and walked about until I encountered him.

"Excuse me," I said.

He stopped and looked at me, preoccupied. I held out my hand. He took it. I introduced myself.

He dropped my hand, said, "Oh, my God!" and walked away, moving more swiftly than I had ever seen him move.

I was bewildered and nettled by this curious behavior until the next day when he came into my office and said, "I'm sorry about yesterday. Dalton just told me your name is *Kamin*. I thought you said *Kamin*."

"What about it?"

"Kamin was my first publisher. Martin Kamin. Moss and Kamin. I had a hell of a bad time with him. And when I heard that name...well." He looked out the window and saw, I suppose, New York. "He did so badly with *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*."

"Terrific book," I said. "That's one of the things I wanted to tell you yesterday."

"Tell me today."

"Terrific book."

"Thanks," he said. "It sold four hundred and thirty-one copies."

"Four hundred and thirty-two," I said.

"Anyway, I'm glad you're 'n' not 'm'."

"It's like Goldwyn," I said.

"What is?"

"I worked for him all last year and tried to get him to do 'Cyrano'—a marvelous Ben Hecht screenplay of it—with Olivier. And Goldwyn said no, because he'd made a picture with Colman called *Cynara*, and it lost a fortune."

West nodded, appreciatively. No laugh, no smile, simply a nod.

"Goldwyn," he said. "My first Hollywood dough. It was right after *Lonelyhearts*. He asked me to write something for his new star, Anna Sten. I stayed in the East and did it. Greatest screen story of all time. The end."

"Sit down," I said. "Got a minute?"

"What if the efficiency expert's head comes in?"

"We're talking story."

He sat down.

Thus began my brief, but cherished acquaintance with this uniquely gifted man. I want to believe that had time and fate permitted, he might have become a friend. But as we sat there on that sultry afternoon, with cutting-room sounds floating in through the open window—music and dialogue played crazily forward and backward—talking of the Screen Writers' Guild and Steinbeck's awesome new novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and the wonder of Garbo and the camera wit of Lubitsch and studio sex, Nathanael West was less than two years from his marriage to Eileen McKenney (*My Sister Eileen*); and both of them were less than

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"Terrific Book."

"Thanks," West said.

"It sold 431 copies."

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three years from their death in a station wagon crash on their way home from a Mexicali hunting weekend. (He was thirty-seven, she was twenty-seven; they had been happily married for less than eight months.)

I was to see that intellectual nod of his often.

One afternoon, we were lunching at the writers' table in the RKO commissary. Groucho Marx joined us. The waitress, a disturbingly buxom Dutch girl, was wearing her new-style uniform for the first time, with "Betty" embroidered on the left side of her tightly fitted bodice. Groucho stared at it, studied it, then asked, "What do you call the other one?"

The table roared. West merely registered the moment, and nodded his nod.

He had completed a novel called "The Cheated," and it had been accepted for publication by Bennett Cerf of Random House. Later, its title would be changed to "The Grass Eaters" to "Cry Wolf" to "The Wrath to Come" to "Days to Come" to "The Burning of Los Angeles" and finally to *The Day of the Locust*.



"It's about Hollywood," he told me.

"Pro? Con?"

He shrugged. "I shouldn't have said Hollywood. I don't know anything about Hollywood. Who does? It's about people—people in Hollywood. It's good."

"I can't wait to read it. When?"

"You can wait."

"It'll be a smash," I said. "Then all the bad days out here will have been worth it."

"I wonder," he said, brooding.

We had talked at length about his up-and-down screenwriting career in his office and mine, walking through the cool, empty sound stages, over coffee in the commissary, over drinks at Lucey's across the street, at parties and meetings.

He explained that when he had first come to Hollywood, he had been seriously interested in learning the craft and technique of screenwriting. The *modus operandi*, however, had soon discouraged and frustrated him.

"I don't think they *want* writers, really," he said. "They want super-stenographers—and unfortunately, my shorthand is poor. Anyway, I prefer my longhand. So I just do it and take the money."

"Somebody said the other day it's OK so long as you don't move your hips."

That nod again.

He had good reason for his cynical view of Hollywood.

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**"If there ever was an American author whose gifts were clearly cinematic, that author was Nathanael West."**

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Imagine writing *Miss Lonelyhearts*, and after the customary nervous wait: "Mr. West is an original comic poet; and he has made a miniature comic epic."—Edmund Wilson..."In his work there are no echoes of other men's books."—Dashiell Hammett..."Some of the best writing of the day."—William Carlos Williams...and a spring rain of other fine reviews. Next, the sale of the film rights—and then? Then being signed by Columbia as a junior writer. Junior?

Further, his job at Columbia was to concoct, to order, a screenplay to be called "Beauty Parlor"—meanwhile at Twentieth, an assembly-line tap-tapper was assigned to begin "licking" *Miss Lonelyhearts*.

"Beauty Parlor" was never made, nor was his original, "Return to the Soil." In the latter, West assured me, there was no "writing down." It had in it the best he could give it. Alas, his best was too good for Columbia's purposes.

He left Hollywood, but came back three years later. He needed money, having decided to expand into a full-length novel his short story "Bird and

Bottle" which Lincoln Steffens had published in *Pacific Weekly*.

Three more years of work on stolen time, nights, Sundays (studios worked a six-day week in those days), and layoffs between jobs were to go into this project before the publication, in 1939, of *The Day of the Locust*.

The titles of the movies on which he worked during this disquieting period are enough to convey something of what he must have endured.

At Republic (a low-budget schlock factory): *Ticket to Paradise*, *Follow Your Heart*, *The President's Mystery*, *Gangs of New York* (on and off three times, but no screen credit), *Jim Hanvey—Detective*, *Rhythm in the Clouds*, *Ladies in Distress* (no credit), *Born To Be Wild*, *It Could Happen to You*, *Orphans of the Street* (no credit).

At RKO: *Five Came Back*.

At Universal: *The Spirit of Culver* (starring Jackie Cooper and Freddie Bartholomew; West, the gentle pacifist, puffing a military academy), and *I Stole a Million*. (West told me that during the making of this melodramatic Mulligan stew, the star, George Raft, locked himself into his dressing room and refused to continue shooting until the sign on the bank he was to rob was changed from Federal to City. "I ain't takin' a Federal rap," he said. "Not even in a picture!") Later in the put-together-with-spit story, Raft knocked over a U.S. post office without balking. This was different, he explained, because he didn't get caught.)

At RKO: "Before the Fact" (later made by Alfred Hitchcock as *Suspicion* with no credit to West), *Men Against the Sky*, "Malvina Swings It" (released as *Let's Make Music*. "No doubt worse movies have been made...but at the moment we can't recollect them"—*The New York Times*), and *Stranger on the Third Floor*.

These were the ones that were released, or as Hollywood wags would say: "They weren't released—they *escaped*!"

And there were others that never made it to the screen. "Dead noodles," West called them.

At Republic: "Osceola" and "Bachelor Girl."

At Columbia: "The Squealer."

At MGM: "Heritage of the Wild."

At RKO: "Bird in Hand."

At Columbia: "Amateur Angel" (interrupted by his death).

Few of these originated with West. By and large they were "assignments." Too many Hollywood writers of the time spent their energies in the hustle for assignments, rather than the search (within and without) for themes, ideas, and stories. Most of West's assignments were fractious, uneasy collaborations with operators or hacks—excepting those with Boris Ingster, with whom he formed a convivial and productive partnership in the last two years of his life. They were beginning to build a team reputation and had, among other small triumphs, sold their twenty-five page 'original', "Bird in Hand," to RKO for \$25,000. A thousand dollars a page must have seemed an eminently satisfactory



return to a writer whose four years work on *The Day of the Locust* got him a \$500 advance from Random House.

Moreover, the team of Ingster and West was signed to write the screenplay from their story at \$1,200 a week with a twelve-week guarantee. Hollywood success was within reach. But this was to be Nathanael West's next-to-last deal—his penultimate movie job.

Scott Fitzgerald and Nathanael West were friends. For *The Day of the Locust*, Fitzgerald had written this blurb:

"The book, though it puts Gorki's *The Lower Depths* in the class with *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, certainly has scenes of extraordinary power—if that phrase is still in use. Especially I was impressed by the pathological crowd at the premiere, the character and handling of the aspirant actress, and the uncanny almost medieval feeling of some of his Hollywood background set off by those vividly drawn grotesques."

West found it difficult to understand his friend Fitzgerald's serious attitude toward screenwriting. Fitzgerald was struggling with all that remained of his creative powers to use the screen as his medium of expression, and even hoped to go on to directing his own material. (It was never to be. Scott Fitzgerald's fatal heart attack occurred less than twenty-four hours before West's death.) West found Fitzgerald's Hollywood aspirations touching, but naive. His own experience had painfully demonstrated to him that the Industry (as it was called) had little to offer the creative writer beyond a kind of subsidy. Yes, the money was good. When we were at RKO together, he was earning \$350 a week. Lesser writers on the lot were getting ten times that, but to a man who had written three highly praised novels over a period of seven years and had earned from them a total of \$737, working in Hollywood was an economic windfall.

And yet. If ever there was an American author whose gifts were clearly cinematic, that author was Nathanael West. His daring thought, sense of story, X-ray observation of character, soaring humor, and vivid imagery are all qualities of exceptional screenwriting.

He was a born spellbinder. Quentin Reynolds, who had been his classmate and friend at Brown University, had a series of college-day routines which he performed often in The Cub Room of The Stork Club.

One of them was about the time when Reynolds and a chum had gone into the bootlegging business on campus, had flourished for a while, but then had been caught. Expulsion appeared to be inevitable. But, Quent would relate with relish, into the dilemma strode Pep Weinstein (as he was then known) who wrote a long, tear-jerking speech for Quent to recite to the formidable Dean Otis Randall.

Many years had passed, but Quent's memory still held the complex peroration which Pep's imagination had produced, and he would perform it

brilliantly. It was a heartrending, finely detailed account of family illness, financial reverses, secret sacrifices, and—above all—a desire so passionate to be a Brown graduate that reason had fled. A final touch was a scene in the confessional which had purportedly taken place on the day before he had been apprehended, and which had convinced him to abandon his criminal activity. West/Weinstein made him memorize it. It worked, which is what matters most in drama, as in life.

Quent also recalled that Pep Weinstein had written his Class Day speech for him—an erudite, scholarly fantasy. It was a show-stopping success that in time turned up as a chapter in Nathanael West's first novel.

In pre-Hollywood days, West supported himself by working as night clerk or manager of various small New York hotels. His many friends were delighted since it meant they could always count on a free place to stay.

One of these was Dashiell Hammett, who as the guest of Kenmore Hall (or Nat West) was checked into the best suite of the hotel on East 23rd Street, and finished the pulp serial he was writing for *Black Mask*, called *The Maltese Falcon*. West claimed that he had registered him as "Mr. T. Victrola Blueberry."

The unorthodox spelling of West's first name was often questioned and frequently misspelled. "Nathan Weinstein" did not seem to him appropriate for the author of the books he had in mind. He became Nathanael West. Nathanael with an 'a'—Biblical, one of the disciples.

"Why do you suppose it's usually 'i-e-l'?" I once asked.

"Because in New England," he replied at once, "they can't spell!"

With his witty, inventive power and dazzling comic intelligence, surely he could have made contributions to the screen more significant than the string of sausage-machine B-pictures which constitute his movie "credits."

The abortive affair involving Hollywood and Nathanael West reminds us of a wrong. He is an exemplar of the injustice of the way things were. As his novels grow in importance and stature—becoming classics of American literature—the arid record of his movie output is shamed.

Still, it must be remembered that the narrative film is no more than seventy-five years old—in its infancy when compared to its elder sister, Theater, who has already passed her two-thousandth birthday and is flourishing.

The youngster, then, may be forgiven much. Even now there are hopeful signs that the Art (as opposed to the Industry) is at last beginning to learn that it is vital to make use of writers and not merely to use them. ■

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Garson Kanin directed *The Great Man Votes* and *My Favorite Wife* and wrote the screenplays (with Ruth Gordon) for *Adam's Rib* and *Pat and Mike*. He is the author of *Hollywood*.



# HITCHCOCK

and the Art of Suspense

## Part II

Last month, Gavin Lambert wrote about the creation of fear and suspense in Alfred Hitchcock's British films and in the first films he made after going to Hollywood in 1939. Lambert has written of *Notorious* (1946) that "its subtle and elaborate patterns reflect Hitchcock's principle that the highest suspense arises from a deep emotional underground."

### Gavin Lambert

*Vertigo*, shot in color and expansively staged in a variety of San Francisco backgrounds, uses the same visual strategies as *Notorious*. Scottie (James Stewart) resigns from the police force after developing a fear of heights. He takes on a private assignment to watch a woman whose husband suspects her of suicidal tendencies. In fact, the woman is not Elster's wife, but his mistress and accomplice in a plot conceived to make the murder of his real wife look like a suicide. The novel from which the movie is drawn concentrates on the mechanical deceptions behind the murder. Hitchcock extracts its McGuffin as a point of departure for a study in personal deceptions, and his equation of danger and eroticism becomes even more startling than in *Notorious*. He opens with Scottie literally and metaphorically suspended above a city at night, clinging to the edge of a high roof while the cop who tried to save him pitches toward an alley below. After rapid camera movements and violent cutting have established the terrors of vertical fall, the scene fades out. Hitchcock omits the scene of Scottie's rescue because it's not important. The opening



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images exist to convey a state of indefinite shock and disorientation, prolonged beyond the moment of vertigo. Scottie is ready for another country, and he enters it in a long silent sequence as he follows Madeleine (Kim Novak) through different sections of the city.

He sees her enter a Spanish church and pray, then go to a cemetery where she lays flowers on the grave of a woman who died a hundred years ago. She drives to an abandoned-looking house, opens the door, and seems to disappear without trace. He finds her again in an art museum, staring as if hypnotized at a portrait of the woman buried in the graveyard. By now the movie exerts its own trance-like effect, disorienting the audience as Scottie himself is disoriented, implying the existence of some mysterious gulf between hallucination and reality and the possibility of emotional free fall. A smooth insinuating camera spies on Scottie spying on Madeleine, and a color filter surrounds her figure with a remotely greenish aura. Scottie rescues her from a suicide attempt, the visual aura dissolves and yet she remains unreal, telling stories of dreams and reincarnations, responding with a kind of hopelessness when he makes love. The first half of the story ends when Scottie, because of his vertigo, cannot prevent her second suicide attempt. She throws herself off the tower of a mission church, and he enters a period of nervous breakdown.

Later he sees a girl in the street and follows her home. The dark hair and drugstore style suggest the opposite of Madeleine, yet the resemblance is vivid. At this point Hitchcock breaks all the rules of conventional suspense. He shows this girl, Judy, alone in her apartment. The setting abruptly darkens, and only her figure remains. The darkness merges into the mission tower, the girl merges into Madeleine. A few quick shots establish the false suicide, the actual murder of Elster's wife, Scottie tricked into mistaking one for the other. Discarding the superficial mystery, Hitchcock frees himself to lead Scottie into darker areas of hallucination. The lover now tries to make Judy into Madeleine without realizing she already *is* Madeleine; the girl tries to please him without betraying herself.

Changing the color of Judy's hair, dressing her as Madeleine, unable to make love until the lost image is retrieved, Scottie becomes a sexual fetishist and at the same time turns one illusion into another. He embraces the perfected Judy-Madeleine, the camera circles around them, the background changes as he fantasizes himself back to a moment with the dead. Then, as if drawn too completely into his fantasy, Judy makes a mistake. She brings out a locket that Madeleine used to wear and asks Scottie to fasten it around her neck. As she moves toward him, the faint aura surrounds her figure again. It vanishes as Scottie recognizes the locket and the spell breaks. Like the key in Alicia's hand in *Notorious*, a single object seems almost magically powerful.

The agitated cutting style at the end recalls the

*Alfred Hitchcock performs his customary walk-on in The Birds.*

*The Birds: Alone in an attic room, Tippi Hedren endures the climactic attack by gulls.*



beginning. On the edge of breakdown again, Scottie can think only of returning to the scene of the crime. He drives Judy back to the church, forces her to climb to the top of the tower. Calling her "Madeleine," insisting that he loves her, he seizes her by the throat. As she twists away, a shadow appears at the top of the stairs and terrifies her. Losing her balance, she falls to her death. The camera reveals the intruder as a nun, then a last shot parallels the opening again. Scottie stands looking down from the tower on an empty panoramic landscape, his vertigo cured but the rest of his life achingly suspended.

No other movie of Hitchcock's is so packed with obsessive images. The credits announce an abstract pattern of vertigo that the first scene makes concrete. It recurs when Scottie notices Madeleine's hair piled spirally on the top of her head, when he witnesses the spiral fall of her false suicide on the tower, when his breakdown begins with a dream of toppling into an open grave. In realistic terms, the motif can be traced back to the 1934 *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, after which it reap-



pears in two minor films of the early 1940s. The climax of *Foreign Correspondent* is an extraordinary process shot, showing both the interior of a plane and the drop beyond the cabin windows as it dives out of control toward the ocean. The climax of *Saboteur* shows a man falling from the top of the Statue of Liberty. Hitchcock will echo the same moment of terror at the end of *North by Northwest*. But in *Vertigo* he uses it as a sustained metaphor for the state of fear itself, and for falling beyond it into guilt and illusion.

Visually the climax links religion (the church, the accidental presence of the nun) with sexuality ending in death. The shot of Scottie and Judy climbing the spiral staircase to the tower even contains the link in a single image. But like all of Hitchcock's patterns, this one exists to be recognized rather than explained. Merging reality and dream, *Vertigo* sometimes recalls *The Ministry of Fear*, and Graham Greene's "If one loved, one feared" could be its epigraph. Yet the shared Catholic influence only points up the difference in imaginative approach. Greene superimposes morality on instinct, and Hitchcock superimposes form. His movies are ultimately and finely impartial because, as he's often emphasized, his love of making them is stronger than his love of morality. Greene transmutes original fear into original sin, but Hitchcock concentrates on refining the same emotion to its purest state. His "pure cinema" becomes a process like alchemy, and *Vertigo* provides its supreme example.

In any interview, Hitchcock invariably brings up "pure cinema," and in any discussion of *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Notorious*, or *Vertigo* he can be expected to quote "Each man kills the thing he loves." Asked by one of his more earnest students if he doesn't find Wilde's line "perverted," he replies: "Everything's perverted in a different way, isn't it?"

Hitchcock's way is to look at a common human assumption and find that it contains something sinister or mocking. In *Shadow of a Doubt* he jolts the cosy family idea of a "favorite" uncle; in *Notorious* and *Vertigo* he undermines the conventions of romantic love; and in his other major cycle of American films he continues to search for an imaginative context in which to question the safe and the accepted. Their pattern of coincidence and shock becomes a metaphor for the conclusive disclosure of the unknown in the known. Psychological fear is linked to physical threat, echoing the sense of "evil" followed by punishment inherited from a Jesuit education. In *Rear Window* the not uncommon act of spying on one's neighbors leads to confrontation with a murderer. In *North by Northwest* accidental involvement with an espionage plot strips the hero of all his personal defenses. In *Psycho* Hitchcock structures the shocks to submit the audience itself to the attacks of a psychotic killer. In *The Birds* the heroine has to endure a sudden reversal of the laws of nature.

None of these protagonists (including the audience) is completely innocent. As the niece in

*Shadow of a Doubt* and the detective in *Vertigo* become victims of their own romanticism, the hero of *North by Northwest* and the heroine of *The Birds* are due to have self-satisfaction challenged. The general idea of everything being perverted in a different way finally connects with the general idea planted by Catholicism, that punishment is lurking somewhere for everyone.

With *Saboteur*, soon after going to Hollywood, Hitchcock makes a fairly tentative experiment in adapting the format of his early kinetic adventure movies to the American scene. *Rear Window* (1954) is a much more ambitious attempt to graft old and new methods, and to develop parallel lines of outward and inward suspense. But in spite of some centrally alarming scenes, it remains stronger on outward movement and technical display. A broken leg confines a successful news photographer (James Stewart) to his Greenwich Village apartment, and makes him the wheelchair prisoner of a coolly aggressive blonde (Grace Kelly) who wants to marry him more than he wants to marry her. As a release from emotional pressure and physical inaction, Jeffries begins casually spying on his neighbors across the courtyard. From his window the prisoner glimpses fragments of human behavior imprisoned behind other windows, and magnifies details that interest him with a telephoto lens. Through the peculiar actions of a dour, heavy, middle-aged man, Jeffries comes to suspect that he's murdered his wife and plans to dispose of the body.

**T**he movie derives most of its force from Hitchcock's masterly use of visual implication to re-create a grisly murder, involving dismemberment of a body, storage of parts in the refrigerator, and a series of nighttime disposal jobs. Ordinary domestic routines are interrupted by suggestive images—cleaning an ax, wrapping a saw in paper, measuring a length of rope to tie a parcel. Hitchcock assembles these details from stored memories of two English murder cases in which husbands killed and dismembered their wives. (One of them betrayed himself by not knowing what to do with the head, the other by keeping some of his wife's jewelry.) By concentrating on the dilemmas of mutilation, he makes the act of murder seem at once brutal and absurd. In an equally original way he portrays the murderer as diabolic yet persecuted. After realizing that he's been watched, he confronts Jeffries to protest an invasion of privacy, and as the criminal forgets his guilt and stands on his human rights he changes into an accusing, almost despairing figure.

Only the surrounding texture dissipates the total effect. It grows progressively thinner as life behind the other windows dissolves into stereotype: lonely spinster, young honeymooners, childless couple fixated on dog. Figures preoccupied in different ways with love or marriage, they are conceived to



reflect Jeffries's ambivalence towards both, and a slick idea excites technical virtuosity rather than authentic observation. Apart from one brief episode near the end, all the action across the courtyard is registered through the photographer's eye. The device creates a dynamic visual tension between peeper and murderer, but makes the other windows seem more like television sets with different series programmed on each screen.

In *North by Northwest* (1959) Hitchcock returns to the John Buchan approach of his later British movies, but uses the chase story as a pretext for a fable: Establishment man suddenly forced to live for a few weeks as an outsider. The script, on which he collaborated with Ernest Lehman, found its point of departure in a newspaper anecdote about a man mistaken for someone who never existed. Its protagonist becomes a more fully developed version of Jeffries in *Rear Window*, a merchant of images and an escape artist in private life. Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant), a New York advertising executive, is kidnapped by members of an unnamed espionage group who believe him to be an FBI agent.

The image of Thornhill machine-gunned from the air leads directly to Hitchcock's two following movies, *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963). In each the most spectacular effect is the same, an orgasm of violence that occurs long before the dramatic climax. The plane attacks Thornhill about halfway through *North by Northwest*. The first and most savage murder in *Psycho* and the first mass assault of *The Birds* take place about forty-five minutes after the story opens. Like Thornhill, the characters seem arbitrarily chosen and completely unprepared for sudden danger and death. As a motive behind the punishment gradually emerges, it forms the innermost pattern of each movie.

The first third of *Psycho* concentrates on a girl who works for a real estate agent in Arizona and who steals \$40,000 that her employer hands her to deposit in the bank. She drives out of Phoenix in a state of panic, uncertain where she means to go. For some time Hitchcock leads the audience to expect a story about the girl's predicament, whether she'll be caught, or have a crisis of conscience, or offer the money to her penniless lover. She stops for the night at an empty isolated motel. Its manager is Norman Bates (Tony Perkins), a shy but friendly young man who engages her in a long, curious conversation about his hobby of taxidermy (stuffed owls look down from the office walls) and his feeling that life is a series of "private traps." Norman's most serious trap appears to be his invalid mother, of whom he's obviously afraid and who lives in a California Gothic mansion above the motel.

The girl says good night to Norman, then takes a shower before going to bed. Time is stretched out as the girl turns her face to the jet. She seems to derive sensual pleasure from it, and also perhaps to express an unconscious need to cleanse herself. The stream of water carries and diffuses light like a stained-glass window. A blurred female figure ap-

pears on the other side of the shower curtain, and Hitchcock compresses a murder into seventy close-ups and forty-five seconds of film—"pure cinema" in the cause of pure brutality: repeated thrusts of a knife and spurts of blood, a screaming mouth, a huge glazed single eye, a hand sliding down a wall, a face hitting the floor. A quiet but equally astonishing sequence follows. Norman enters the shower carrying a pail and mop. Like an obedient son trained to clean up after his untidy mother, he erases all the bloodstains, wipes the floor, flushes the toilet, drags out the naked body, and leaves the little bathroom impeccably pure and white. Putting the girl's body in the trunk of her car and driving it to a nearby pond, he seems more childlike than ever, greedily munching candy as he watches the car sink into the muddy water.

With his massacre of a girl who appeared to be the movie's leading character, Hitchcock leaves the audience dazed and completely on its own. Three other characters appear or reappear: the girl's lover, her sister, and an insurance agent assigned to trace the stolen money. The same briefly glimpsed figure of Mrs. Bates soon stabs the agent; the lover and sister remain sketchy and at an emotional distance, so the audience has no one to identify with—except Norman.

Hitchcock later compared the audience of *Psycho* to people entering the haunted house in a fairground and demanding to be scared. The real purpose behind his movie is to analyze the mass mind, not Norman's. After an extended period of false alarm, he maneuvers a victim-audience into total shock and locks it in the same room with a dangerously disturbed young man, the proven accomplice of his mother's crimes. By implying that Norman is also a victim, he excites sympathetic crosscurrents and a degree of mass identification. The next step is even more cunning. Without alienating the audience's affection for Norman, Hitchcock reveals him as the actual murderer.

Years ago the boy killed his widowed mother because he believed she'd taken a lover. Since then he's inhabited a secret twilight zone, talking to a fully dressed skeleton stuffed with sawdust and "becoming" his mother when sexual tensions compel him to murder again. Yet the final image of Norman, huddled inside a blanket under a bare police station wall, makes him pitiable rather than obscene. As he notices a fly settle on his hand, Hitchcock briefly superimposes the mother's face on the son's. Then Norman decides not to kill the fly because Mother never liked violence. Lapsing into a terminal confusion of identities, he is still a victim—not of his mother, as Hitchcock first led the audience to believe, but of a psychosis. It places him beyond moral judgement, and his persisting childishness seems like a reminder of the fact.

The subject is horrible, as Hitchcock has said, unrelieved by a single admirable character, yet it arouses a strong mass emotion. He attributes this to the power of filmmaking. The deceptively modest black-and-white style conceals a subtle and

**In *Psycho*  
"Hitchcock  
compresses a  
murder into  
seventy close-ups  
and forty-five  
seconds of film."**

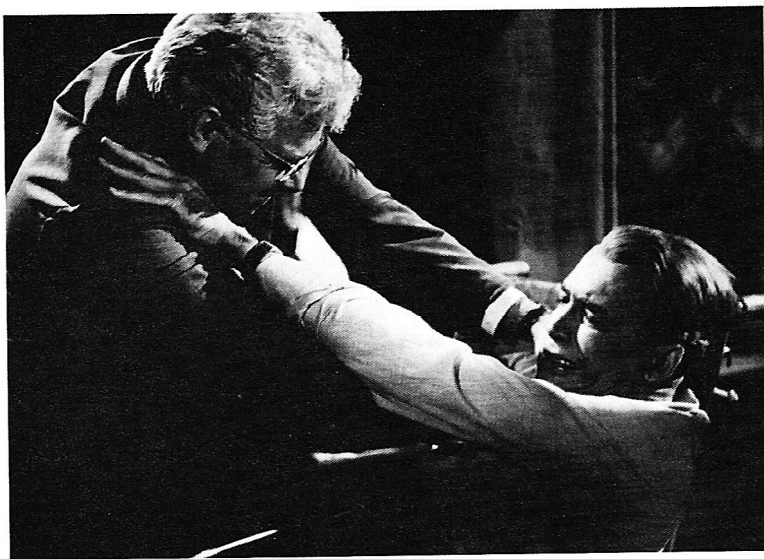




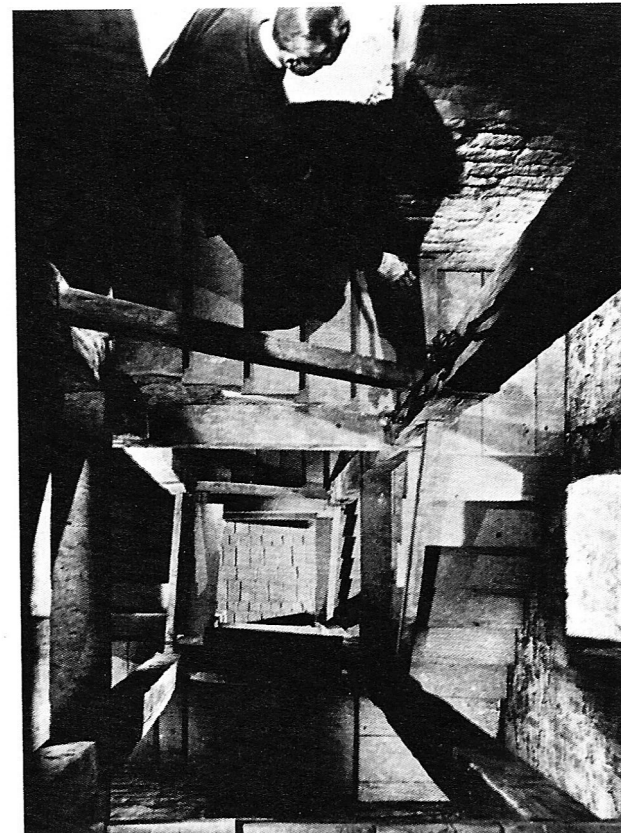
*Above: Cary Grant in North by Northwest. 'Beneficial shocks' to upset the false equilibrium of civilization.*

*Left: Tony Perkins in Psycho. He is the killer as victim, beyond moral judgment.*

*Below: James Stewart in Vertigo. The psychologically disoriented detective.*



*Raymond Burr, James Stewart in Rear Window. The sudden intrusion of danger.*





barbed skill, but the mass reaction it generates is not abstract. Hitchcock begins his play on audience fears with the relatively easy ploy of establishing emotional complicity with a thief. He ends by cementing it with a deranged killer. To elicit such a powerful response is to touch another collective nerve. Norman's act of mass hypnosis shows that instinctual fears and fascination with violence are more conclusive than acquired morality.

*The Birds* shifts the phobias of a solitary individual to some traditional feathered friends. It derives from a story by Daphne du Maurier, itself derived from a short novel by Arthur Machen, *The Terror*, in which people are also attacked by moths and farm animals. Machen's fable, against a background of the First World War, implies that the animal kingdom has lost respect for the human empire: "Hence, I think, the Terror. They have risen once—they may rise again." Although Hitchcock's movie withholds any specific explanation, its human characters are uncertain and conflicted, and the end suggests the birds only pausing before their next assault. Hitchcock once said that he conceived his films as "beneficial shocks," aimed to disturb the false equilibrium of civilized manners and to jolt emotional numbness. The intent certainly appears strongest in his extraordinary series of movies made in the late fifties and early sixties, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, *Psycho*, and finally *The Birds*.

Although an early shot of birds against a darkly clouded sky strikes a throwaway warning note, the movie develops at first like a romantic comedy of manners. As in *Psycho*, Hitchcock approaches the central situation by way of a detour. A rich San Francisco girl (Tippi Hedren) begins a flirtation with a handsome but stolid lawyer (Rod Taylor) who lives in Bodega Bay, an oceanside community farther up the coast. When she buys a pair of love birds as a birthday present for his young sister, Hitchcock lightly extracts two metaphors from the scene: Melanie's own life in a gilded cage, and the conventional association of birds with love and friendship. When the attacks begin, a third and contradictory metaphor emerges. The birds swoop down on the center of town, and as Melanie takes refuge in a glass-walled phone booth, the usual roles are reversed. Birds become masters, the human being is trapped in a cage. By the end, while the connection between birds and love has not been entirely broken, it seems very insecure. As Melanie and the lawyer's family escape from Bodega Bay, the young sister asks if she can bring her love birds along. Hundreds of gulls and crows respond to this innocent act of faith with an ambiguous stillness, watching and muttering as the car drives away.

The birds always pause and regroup between attacks, their plan of campaign as enigmatic as their motives. Like the schoolboy registered for punishment by the Jesuits, each character in the movie suspects his name has been entered for corrective shock, then has to wait for it. The atmosphere of

delayed judgement creates the most disturbing suspense, epitomized in the scene of Melanie sitting outside the schoolhouse, unaware of crows amassing on telegraph wires behind her. Since her brittle self-satisfaction is Hitchcock's chief target, she has to wait longer than anyone else. Alone in an attic room, she endures the climactic attack. Bloodied and gangbeaked, she revives from a stupor and begins to beat the empty air with her hands, a strange and intense gesture that betrays more than the reflex of panic. The preceding scene has shown the family sitting in the barricaded house at night, a complete human unit now in a cage. Outside the windows, birds start to peck at the slats of wood. Beaks jab and splinter their way through like atavistic fears conjured up from the darkness. Long after they've finished with her, Melanie seems unaware that she's woken up from a nightmare and still strikes out at apparitions. Impartial as ever, Hitchcock never tips the point, but the frenzy and manic strength of normally domestic creatures suggest a form of supernatural possession.

**T**he final image is of indefinite suspense: Tribes of birds are perched on the ground, on fences and trees, in a violent early morning light. The sound track accompanies it with an electronic murmur just above the level of silence. Extremely ominous, its effect is less annihilating than the shot of Norman Bates huddled against a vacant wall, since fear unites rather than disrupts the family in *The Birds*. As uneasy relationships shift into closeness, Hitchcock finds some of his subtlest human patterns. The lawyer's widowed mother begins as a predator no less potentially dangerous than the birds, but ends by recognizing her terror of loneliness, as if the greater terror exorcises it. Making an effort to understand her, Melanie moves beyond playing games and shows her vulnerability. The lawyer realizes that he underestimated her and depended too much on his mother. *Maybe* there is something in the idea of love birds after all.

At moments the images of violence arriving from the sky are technically unconvincing, most of all when the birds attack the children outside the schoolhouse. But there are two stunning sequences of assault on an individual and on a whole community: The birds closing in on Melanie, and swooping down from above the bay on the town itself. Here an aerial shot emphasizes the isolated surround of farmland and ocean, and compels the eye to a few details at the center, the gas pump on fire, the horse and cart overturning, the abandoned hose spouting water. Most haunting of all is the aftermath of an attack not shown, as the mother drives over to the house of a neighboring chicken farmer to find him eyeless and mutilated in the wreckage of his bedroom, a dead gull embedded like a signature in a shattered windowpane. Like the shot of Nor-



man's bedroom in *Psycho*, with its chastely rumpled bed and weird clutter of childhood toys and Beethoven recordings, it invades the subconscious by suggesting a mysterious psychic upheaval behind the physical disorder.

Coincidence, so often used by Hitchcock as a dramatic hinge, also haunted the beginning of his American career. The subject of his first Hollywood film was offered, not chosen, yet it released one of the vital patterns in his subsequent work. In *Rebecca*, underlying the gloss of a conventional best-selling novel and production, is the situation of ordeal by riddle and warning which so many of Hitchcock's later characters will endure. Almost a quarter of a century later it is still there in *Marnie* (1964). This movie, like *The Wrong Man* (1957) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951), is spasmodic and rather disjointed, but contains sequences on a high imaginative level. Together they complete an indirect self-portrait that emerges almost subliminally, like Hitchcock's own brief superimpositions, from his work as a whole.

A childhood trauma has left Marnie (Tippi Hedren) with a sexual fear of men and turned her into a compulsive thief. For a rich and highly sexed publisher (Sean Connery), a beautiful safecracker is an aphrodisiac, and he falls in love with her. The fetishistic love story recalls *Vertigo*, but its tone is more literal and restricted by case-history dialogue. Hitchcock finds a much stronger tension in the scenes of Marnie trying to overcome the past by blocking it from memory. Like the birds hurling themselves against boarded-up windows, it forces itself back into the present. Anger and shame and blood have the same color association for Marnie, and Hitchcock saturates the screen with a violent red to convey her subjective reaction to a spill of red ink on a white shirt, a bunch of gladioli, a scarlet hunting jacket. Expressionistic touches recur in the final scene when Marnie relives the trauma with her harsh and embittered mother. A slum street in a harbor city leads to the unexpected dead end of a huge towering ship. The deliberately artificial set and painted backdrop evoke a private place somewhere between the actual and the remembered, and the sense of confinement and menace suggests a parallel with Hitchcock's own childhood.

**I**n *The Wrong Man* a New York jazz musician is arrested for a murder he didn't commit. The first hour provides a hypnotic summary of Hitchcock's fear of the police. Confinement is again the keynote as reiterated images of handcuffs, finger-printing devices, and prison bars insist on the humiliating ritual of arrest and accusation, and Balestrero is gradually reduced to an impassive cipher. The tension drops when the emphasis moves to Balestrero's wife and her breakdown under stress, but the climax is again very personal in its ambiguous

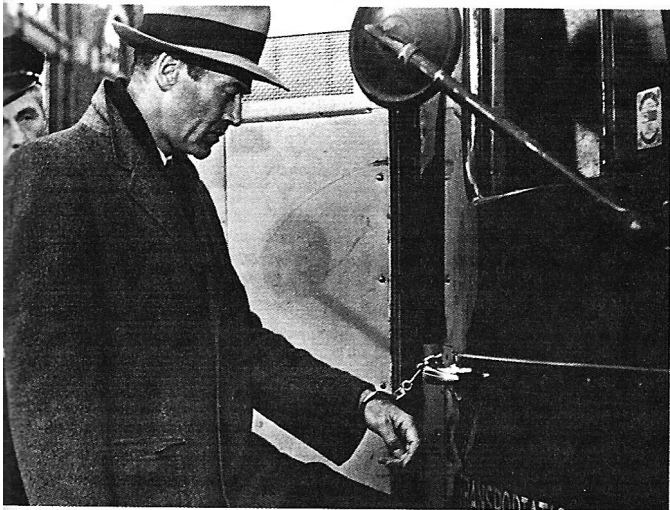
attitude toward the Catholic faith. Encouraged by his mother, Balestrero prays for a "miracle." As he does so, the real murderer is discovered, and Hitchcock slowly superimposes his face on Balestrero's, revealing their strong physical resemblance as one merges into the other. Then Balestrero offers another prayer, this time for the wife's recovery. But there is no sign that it will be answered, and Hitchcock leaves his protagonist on the frontier between miracle and coincidence.

In *Strangers on a Train* a dangerously intelligent lunatic proposes an exchange of murders to a famous tennis player whom he meets for the first time on a train. Bruno offers to kill Guy's wife, who stands in the way of his marriage to a senator's daughter by refusing to agree to a divorce, if Guy will kill Bruno's rich, tyrannical father. The police, he's convinced, will never be able to solve two murders without traceable motives. Although Guy rejects the proposal, his unconscious reacts with a stab of interest. He leaves his cigarette lighter behind, and Bruno pockets it. As an object once again becomes a psychological clue, and its slant recalls young Charlie finding the dead woman's ring in her uncle's bedroom, the human pattern of Guy and Bruno promises a variation of *Shadow of a Doubt*. But this time the innocent attracted by the damned is a blurred passive character whose dilemma (how to free himself from a slut and deliver himself to a frigid Washington socialite) too obviously suggests the victim type. Unhappy with Raymond Chandler's first script, Hitchcock apparently never found a satisfactory writer for the project. He salvages from it an electrifying sequence of a fair-ground killing and a portrait of an engaging maniac for whom murder is the ultimate adventure.

In a movie curiously peopled with unattractive women, Bruno's dazed and doting mother emerges as the only sympathetic female character and at the same time provides a key to his homosexuality. Although film censorship still imposed an almost total reticence on the subject, Hitchcock and a talented actor (Robert Walker) found subtle accents to imply it. Following the classic pattern of sexual tensions which lead to imaginative derangement, Bruno joins Uncle Charlie and Norman Bates in the pantheon of murderers who fascinate by being extreme. Insane people interpreting reality in their own way, they live beyond moral boundaries.

With their use of photographic realism to convey unreality, Dali's paintings often suggest a single frame from a movie, and a single frame from a Hitchcock film could sometimes be a surrealistic painting. Both artists compose in a similar way, using vertical lines to suggest fear and tension, and a horizontal line for space and solitude. Like one of Dali's elongated figures or processions in a desert, *Vertigo*'s final image concentrates its shock on a man looking down from a high tower, the flat receding landscape emphasizing his isolation. Near the end of *North by Northwest* Hitchcock creates an extraordinary juxtaposition when two people cling





*The Wrong Man* is a near documentary reflection of Hitchcock's fear of confinement and the police. Henry Fonda is the musician arrested for a murder he didn't commit.



to a high ledge on Mount Rushmore, overlooked by the huge stone faces of American Presidents, beyond astonishment and literally stable as rock. Many scenes and details from his movies could be titled like surrealistic paintings: Human Being Caged by Bird, Cigarette Extinguished in Fried Egg (*To Catch a Thief*), and as a presentation of the extreme not even Dali has gone further than, Young Man Dressed As His Dead Mother Knifing a Naked Girl Under a Shower.

"The sexual instinct, the sentiment of death, and the anguish of space-time"—Dali's inventory of his own obsessions applies equally to Hitchcock. They have further affinities as born Catholics later strongly influenced by psychoanalysis. When Hitchcock was planning a dream sequence for *Spellbound* (1945) he asked the painter to collaborate with him. The producer vetoed many of their ideas as too costly and both were disappointed with the result. The movie itself is disabled by an impossible script, about a lady psychiatrist who falls in love with an amnesiac patient suspected of murder; and yet Hitchcock extracts from the asylum setting some of his most revealing moments of free association. Over a shot of lovers embracing, he superimposes a series of doors opening on a perspective of infinite distance. To retrace an early traumatic memory he begins with fork prongs indenting a white tablecloth, which lead to a shot of ski trails and then to the key moment of a child sliding onto the spikes of an iron fence. There is also an image that anticipated *Psycho* as the camera discovers an aura of fear in an empty bathroom, and its fixtures become like menacing alienated objects.

A man who locates fear in a toilet seat, or a bunch of red gladioli, or a piece of rope, obviously finds nothing safe in the ordinary. His mistrust of the everyday article naturally extends to the everyday world, where innocent men are accused of murder

but the most apparently innocent also commit it. Describing himself as full of fears, Hitchcock also confesses a need to be surrounded by order: "I get a feeling of inner peace from a well-organized desk." His movies reflect the same emotional symmetry, their tensions created by his unconscious and resolved by his sense of form. On the most extreme situation Hitchcock imposes an ultimate restraint. His early life submitted him to the polarities of restraint: the repression that excites fear and the discipline that supplies release. For the child in the prison cell, the same door closed and opened. Later a stable and fulfilling marriage helped to appease his insecurities, another pattern that the movies explore when they emphasize parental relationships as destructive and love as one of the coincidences of danger.

The most ironic pattern in Hitchcock's art lies in its relation to commercial pressures, another form of restraint that proves finally stimulating. His temperament demands commercial as well as creative success, since the more popular his movies, the more powerful his ability to manipulate an audience and to reach an area of the collective unconscious. Connecting with millions of people becomes a method of self-defense. Hitchcock has said that whenever he conceives a threatening dramatic situation, he instinctively puts himself in the victim's place. With each successful film he restores equilibrium by putting his audience in the same place. The last polarity emerges as the sound of applause dissolves into the mass echo of his own most extreme fears. ★

Gavin Lambert, screenwriter and novelist, is the author of *GWTW: The Making of Gone With the Wind* and of *On Cukor*. This article is adapted from *The Dangerous Edge*, his latest book, to be published in April by Grossman Publishers.



### Win Sharples

This is at once the very best of times and the very worst of times for motion picture music. I have just returned from my weekly prowling among the tape and record houses of Manhattan, heavy laden, rare and precious treasures spilling from my bulging shopping bags, the wastebasket now awash with crumpled plastic wrap, the children sullen and retreating, for tonight no nascent Liverpudlians shall hold forth within my house.

And how shall I begin? With Robert Altman's bizarre and brilliant *Images*, its schizoid score by John Williams performed by percussionist Stomu Yamashta upon the glass tubes and stainless-steel prisms of Baschet sculptures? Might I choose a disc from RCA's superb Gerhardt-Korngold series on the classic film composers: Miklos Rozsa, Max Steiner, Alfred Newman, Erich Wolfgang Korngold; or "Captain Blood: The Classic Film Scores for Errol Flynn?" Or perhaps "Miklos Rozsa Conducts His Great Film Music" or David Raksin's brand new recording of his music from *Laura*, *Forever Amber*, and *The Bad and the Beautiful*? For something unique, possibly *Fahrenheit 451*, from "The Fantasy Film World of Bernard Herrmann," or *The Egyptian*, a fascinating collaboration between two giants, Alfred Newman and Bernard Herrmann. From records still in print—films of the fifties, scores of the seventies—Elmer Bernstein's *Man With the Golden Arm* or *The Ten Commandments*, Dmitri Tiomkin's *Giant*, George Duning's *Picnic*, Rozsa's *Ben-Hur*. Or, from United Artists' "Limited Edition Collector's Series," Georges Delerue's *King of Hearts*, Ennio Morricone's *Burn!* or *Battle of Algiers*, Alex North's *The Misfits*.

**F**inally I have chosen, and, as the final notes of Nino Rota's brilliant march from Fellini's *8½* ("Rota: Toutes les musiques de film de Fellini") fade out, I settle back to listen to Bernard Herrmann's "Symphony," one of a baker's dozen of concert music recordings of the "serious" music—as opposed to the frivolity of the music for the film?—of Rozsa and Herrmann.

Herrmann. *Citizen Kane*, of course, and a brilliant series of films for Alfred

## Explorations

Hitchcock. Easily the glamour figure of film composers today, a *shelf* devoted to his records in several of the New York stores. *Sisters*, *Psycho*, *Battle of Neretva*, *Vertigo*, *The Night Digger*, *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, *North by Northwest*, "pirate" or legitimate, I had my choice of those today.

And the books pour forth. Tony Thomas's fine *Music for the Movies*; James Limbacher's *Film Music*, vast, useful, and often careless listing of composers' credits; Christopher Palmer's biography of Miklos Rozsa; Mark Evan's *Soundtrack*; and Irwin Bazelon's *Knowing the Score*; Charles Berg's *An Investigation of the Motives for and Realization of Music to Accompany the American Silent Film, 1896-1927*; and, the bastions lonely manned by Royal Brown (*High Fidelity*) and Page Cook (*Films in Review*), for years the only film sound track reviewers, now are ably defended, too, by Palmer (*The Gramophone*).

And yet, it is the very worst of times—"the people who are doing the hiring of film composers are thinking more of the 'chart' than the art" (Elmer Bernstein). A time of twenty-three-year-old producers lunging desperately for the Top Forty bonanza via disc-jockeyed *nonscores* by *noncomposers* for their *nonmovies*, a time when great composers sit idle while their classic scores are honored in concert and on disc.

In this time of schism, there are some who lead the way toward a sanity of motion picture music, who through their devotion and intelligence offer us a beginning.

"I am deeply touched by your idea to organize a Miklos Rozsa Society....But somehow I think that the aim of the soci-

ety should not be alone to promote M.R., but to fight for better music in films and to reestablish sanity in concert music...a fight against the dilettantism, song-plugging, and cheap commercialism in present-day films, and the sheer lunacy of the so-called musical avant-garde....For years I thought about establishing a society called 'Musica Sana' to counteract...unmentionable musical horrors."

—Miklos Rozsa

And so, in 1971, the Miklos Rozsa Society and its quarterly, *Pro Musica Sana*, are formed.

And then, in the summer of 1974:

"I suggested the notion that a club should be formed for the purpose of recording and thereby preserving film scores of the past....I think the primary value in what we intend to do is to produce completely faithful reproductions of entire scores...to present all the pieces of a particular score which represent it well and which can stand alone."

—Elmer Bernstein

There was, of course, in these two approaches, a significant difference. Rozsa was responding to the wishes of a group devoted to the prospect of making his considerable body of work more available for study and enjoyment, at a time when that body of work was all but complete. (Rozsa has completed one concert work—the *Tripartita*—and one film score—*The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*—since the founding of the society, to the delight of its members.)

The Miklos Rozsa Society's goals, therefore, were: to encourage the recording of Rozsa's work—*Seventh Voyage* was issued as a disc, and the society's struggles to bring this about were an odyssey worthy of Sinbad himself and make fascinating reading in its journal, *Pro Musica Sana*; to encourage concert performance, both of his film and concert work; to prepare comprehensive tapes and discographies and then to act to share with fellow members any available tapes, including those made from TV performances by the Society itself; and, finally, to encourage the publishing of critical writing on Rozsa. (From the start, the group held to Rozsa's wishes and dealt with film music in general, while emphasizing the work of Rozsa.)

The Bernstein proposal was also, in a sense, a response, this time to an article,



"Whatever Happened to Great Movie Music?" which the composer had contributed to the June 1972 issue of *High Fidelity*. He ended upon the same note which began this present article: "How ironic that in an era in which music enjoys its greatest popularity as an art, film producers are demonstrating the greatest ignorance of the use of music in films since the beginning of that medium's history."

A flood of response convinced Bernstein, president of the Composers and Lyricists Guild of America and a man who has long demonstrated a deep sense of his responsibility to put back into life a fair measure of the bounty he has received from it, that he had an obligation to act. And so, quite extraordinarily, a gifted and prodigiously busy composer at the peak of his career saw an obligation to honor and to promote the work of his colleagues. This is not to say that such is not the characteristic of other film composers (much the same could be said of Bernstein's friend, David Raksin, who preceded him as CLGA president), but Bernstein went a significant step further than had the Miklos Rozsa group.

In addition to the publishing of a quarterly journal, *The Film Music Notebook*, he proposed the forming of a society to encourage the recording of previously unavailable film scores; even, if necessary, when original materials had been lost or senselessly destroyed, by commissioning the composer to reconstruct a full score from existent sketch materials. In fact, this is precisely what has been done in the case of Hugo Friedhofer's superb score to *The Best Years of Our Lives*, on which the composer is presently working for the Elmer Bernstein Film Music Collection. *Best Years*, perhaps the peak achievement of the man described by David Raksin as having "a better understanding of film music than any composer I know," is indispensable to the heritage of motion picture music. If the Film Music Collection accomplished nothing more than the saving of this score, it would be of value. In fact, Bernstein has said there are a hundred scores he wishes to preserve; a statement about both the size of the job and the importance of his dedication to it.

Let's not delay any further in stating the worth of *Pro Musica Sana* and *The Film Music Notebook*. If PMS devoted its next four years to a sixteen-part essay by Ken Sutar on *Fun in Acapulco* and the FMC made as a condition of my membership that I purchase six copies of an embossed leather, gold inlaid album of *Cat Woman of the Moon* on two overpriced LPs, I would still support them. And I would require as a condition of friendship that anyone whom I know, love, and trust as a fervent supporter of the cinema (actually, I do not know anyone whom I love and trust who is *not* a fervent supporter of film) subscribe faithfully to both societies. This is not to imply that I have any strong suspicions or inside information of the likelihood of either of these events occurring (although each society *does* have its little idiosyncracies); I merely point out that this is no time to quibble over their value. There is only one thing which these societies need to grow and flourish, and that is to be known to more of the people they would enlighten and delight.

Although I have stressed their similarities, I do not wish to give the impression that these worthy societies are identical. (Indeed, each film lover must support *both* with equal passion and comparable loyalty.) A brief description of each seems in order.

The Miklos Rozsa Society is essentially three people: its director John Fitzpatrick; Mary Peatman; and Mark Koldys, who administers the society's tape subscription service. All write regularly for the quarterly journal, *Pro Musica Sana* and very well, although Koldys once sent me into a three-day rage by stating that "the relationship of the music to the film, although of interest to scholars and devotees (sic!), is actually of secondary importance in its appraisal." There have also been significant contributions by the redoubtable Christopher Palmer, Frank DeWald, and Ken Sutar, whose sprawling four-part essay on Alex North's *A Streetcar Named Desire* manages to be both totally unique and a peak of attainment in film music writing for which we all should strive.

In its fourteen published journals the society, by my count, has amassed the impressive total of thirty-six critiques—five of films, twenty-four of discs, three of books, and four of concert works. This is clearly their strength, but there is also a

solid body of some seventeen other articles, seven of which are theoretical, a definitive three-part coverage of the recorded works of Rozsa, something which is needed for *every* major film composer.

The society's subscription service has made available to its members a total of thirty-two tapes, predominantly of Rozsa's music, although Herrmann, North, and Newman are also represented. These consist of transcriptions from 78 RPM discs, tapes of out-of-print LPs and/or radio broadcasts, original session music tracks, and, predominantly, audio tapes made from TV broadcasts. Fitzpatrick makes a strong case for the TV tape as a basic necessity for the study of film music—of film music, as Frank DeWald would have it, the score inseparable from the visual images of the film—and he is absolutely right.

In the impressive output of *Pro Musica Sana*, several articles stand out. Mary Peatman's on *Louisiana Story*, Frank DeWald's on "Film music and Film Music," the Fitzpatrick-DeWald-Koldys critique on *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, Koldys's exhaustive analysis of *Ben-Hur*, and the above-mentioned Sutar four-parter on *Streetcar* deserve inclusion in any film theory anthology.

I must admit that I am and always will be flabbergasted at the dedication of people who devote the enormous energy, intelligence, and love required to produce work of such quality which is seen only by those few who share their passion for the subject. It comes close to being a definition of artistry—"Ars gratia artis," as MGM would have it—excellence for its own sake, and for the satisfaction of oneself and "the special few." Need I say that *Pro Musica Sana* belongs in every library and on every film lover's bookshelf, and that the subscriber must begin with the back issues?

The Elmer Bernstein Film Music Collection was seen from the beginning by its founder as "formed for the purpose of recording and thereby preserving film scores of the past." This is its *raison d'être*, and its journal, *The Film Music Notebook*, takes its dominant character from this. Thus far each of the four journals has concentrated on a particular



composer in connection with the society's release of a disc of his score(s), and this has included each time an up-to-date and accurate filmography, an indispensable tool.

Each issue has also contained an interview by Elmer Bernstein, and his knowledge of music and rapport with those interviewed are notable assets. The first interview, with Hugo Friedhofer, was a competent beginning; it meanders a bit and has no focus, but contains occasional fascinating insights; a second, with George Roy Hill—Bernstein had, of course, won an Academy Award for that director's *Thoroughly Modern Millie*—was an interesting picture of one of the rare directors noted for his knowledge of music and his ability to communicate with the composer. The Leo Shuken interview—Shuken's impressive career of over forty years, with an involvement as orchestrator with virtually every major film composer in this country, made him an inspired choice—was a classic, professionally done in the best sense of the word. The Daniele Amfitheatrof interview was so perfect a choice from the anecdotal standpoint that Bernstein could have left the room with a tape recorder running and produced a work of equal merit and delight. All told, a wonderful series of considerable value.

*The Film Music Notebook* has two major assets, Elmer Bernstein and Fred Steiner. Bernstein, by his energy, his intelligence, and his extraordinary drive, permeates the journal and the work of the society; it is something of which he can be very proud. Fred Steiner is both a film composer of considerable competence and experience and a candidate for a doctorate in musicology at U.C.L.A. (his subject: Alfred Newman, the first recognition of a "film" composer as a legitimate subject for doctoral study!). Steiner is on intimate terms with the majority of Hollywood composers, and so by ability, access, and qualification in a position to be in the first rank of film music scholarship and criticism.

In *The Film Music Notebook* Steiner set out "to furnish an experimental prototype analysis for students of cinema music who may wish to analyze film scores...to strike a balance between information of musical interest and that of cinematic interest." His two-part analysis, "Herrmann's 'Black-and-White' Music for Hitchcock's *Psycho*," is precisely that, absolutely first rate, and his liner notes for the Collection's *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (Herrmann also) are the best I have ever seen for scholarship and usefulness, well suiting the collection's goals.

In its first year the Collection has published five interviews (including a devastating "annotated interview" with Wil-

liam Friedkin), four definitive filmographies, two film score critiques and eight other articles, thus far avoiding disc critiques—the mainstay of the Rozsa Society—but in the end, the true value of the project must be measured on its own terms, as the producer of four discs of previously "lost scores," each prepared and conducted by Bernstein.

The first issue, Max Steiner's *Helen of Troy* and *A Summer Place*, was an almost obligatory choice, an obvious attempt at homage to the man revered as the progenitor of motion picture composing, author of an estimated 338 film scores! Whether it was an ideal choice for Bernstein's own temperament is another question, and the disc does have a strangely perfunctory quality about it, as though it was indeed "almost an obligation."

**T**he second choice, Bernstein's own *The Miracle*, surprisingly also lacked an inspired performance, perhaps because of the artistic and temperamental development of its author (it was originally written in 1959) quite possibly because of some corner-cutting in the orchestration. (This might seem shocking to the reader unfamiliar with the staggering cost of music recording, but it must be remembered that the special courage of Bernstein's project is that it makes no attempt to pander to the mass public and is quite obviously being supported by Bernstein himself until it builds up the necessary head of steam. Indeed, the project would be impossible were it not for his contribution of enormous time and effort, including trips to England to record the scores.) On the same disc, Bernstein's score for Charles and Roy Eames's *Toccata for Toy Trains*, significantly performed by a smaller ensemble, is a genuine delight. Certainly both discs belong in any film music collection, but their failure to transcend the basic material must have been gallingly to Bernstein himself.

With the third offering, Franz Waxman's *The Silver Chalice*, the corner was turned. Waxman habitually wrote wonderfully inventive music that is genuinely enjoyable to listen to, and the recording here is a very good job; if the first two discs are the ones you must own yourself, *Chalice* is the first that you would send a friend. Finally, with Herrmann's *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, Bernstein has produced his first transcendent recording. The liner notes, by Fred Steiner, once more succeed in setting a model for future work of this sort, written with his customary precision, clarity, and devotion to the standards of scholarship. The score is an extraordinary one by a man who is in no

way demeaned by calling him "a born film composer," possessed of the perfect combination of talent and instinct and absolute obsessive dedication necessary for this field. The performance? Exquisite.

I believe there is one more comparison between the Miklos Rozsa Society and the Film Music Collection that must be made. Mary Peatman of PMS is the wife of John Fitzpatrick, and Eve Adamson, the heretofore unmentioned editor of *The Film Music Notebook*, is the wife of Bernstein, each cloaked in an anonymity which is a product of the filmmaker's traditional reticence about multiple credits. It somehow seems to some to be "amateurish," although such never seemed to trouble Charles Chaplin, Orson Welles, or for that matter, Gordon Craig. Well, bagged cat or no, I think this should be mentioned. Mary Peatman happens to write very well, and anyone who has known Eve Adamson for ten minutes can sense her warmth and intelligence behind the *Notebook*. There is something quite wonderful about each journal that cannot be explained in any other way than that these are the works of a "family," of what I have always called a community of love.

Finally, these two groups come together in one more important way. The next offering of the Film Music Collection is to be Miklos Rozsa's *Young Bess*, the first work written of in the very first issue of *Pro Musica Sana*, one of Rozsa's best, a transcendent score itself. I can think of no other film music work that could serve, as we have seen the writing of Fred Steiner serve, as model and text for those who would understand the craft. It should be studied by everyone who loves film music. It is a superlative choice for this group which has come of age in its first year, and I await it eagerly.

There is only one thing these two devoted groups now need—twice, three times, ten times their present members to support and delight in their fine work. It is up to you.

The Elmer Bernstein Film Music Collection  
P.O. Box 261  
Calabasas, CA 91302

The Miklos Rozsa Society  
John Fitzpatrick  
303 E. 8th St., Apt 12  
Bloomington, IN 47401

Tell them I sent you. A labour of love is rarely to be found in the world today.

Film editor, film teacher, and author of a forthcoming book, *Cinematic Cinema*, Win Sharples has joined The American Film Institute as an administrator of preservation and documentation.



West Germany also provided Werner Herzog's *Everyone For Himself and God Against All*, which recounts the real-life case of a boy, Kaspar Hauser, filthy and almost without speech, who appeared in the streets of Nuremberg in 1828. He later explained that he had been imprisoned from childhood in a dark cellar, with no kind of contact with the world or people. Kaspar lived for five years as the pet and curiosity of the town, learned to speak, to write, and to comprehend music; and was then mysteriously murdered, leaving the enigma unsolved.

Herzog shows the disconcerting effect upon a bourgeois society of this pure being, a creature suddenly born into full manhood, with his inability to accept the conventions, the beliefs, and the logic of his new surroundings. Herzog's Kaspar derives a devastating reality from the actor: To play him the director chose Bruno S., a man permanently scarred by society from a life spent in mental institutions after being abandoned in infancy by his prostitute mother.

Herzog is the cinema's holy fool; and his films are realized visions rather than stories. He discovered one of his own, absorbed, intense heroes in the real-life figure of an amateur ski champion whom he made the center of a documentary (shown both in London and in Paris) *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner*. Herzog's images—the skier suspended by slow motion in space—are themselves ecstatic as he creates his portrait of the wood-carver who looks like a puppet carved in wood, and cannot help himself from seeking the terror of his phenomenal, record-breaking, and neck-breaking ski jumps.

In *Karl May*, Jans-Jürgen Syberberg continues his series of impressionistic studies of German history with a strange, fragmented portrait of the popular writer whose novels—somewhere between Jules Verne and Baron Münchhausen—enthralled Hitler. To give resonance to his picture of a period, Syberberg has chosen actors from the Third Reich and earlier, including Lil Dagover, whose career began as the star of *Caligari*; Kristina Soderbaum, former wife of Veit Harlan (director of some of the most notorious Nazi films); and the director Helmut Kauner.

Wim Wenders's account of the travels of a 1975 Wilhelm Meister, *Wrong Movement*, and Jean-Marie Straub's mesmerically static film version of Schönberg's *Moses and Aaron* are both a matter of taste; and I admit they are not mine. West Germany also in part claimed James Ivory's *Autobiography of a Princess*, which appeared, as an Anglo-German coproduction, at both festivals. This is easily James Ivory's best film since *Shakespeare Wallah*, a unique work in

miniature format. An Indian princess (Madhur Jaffrey), living somewhere in middle-class residential London, invites her father's old tutor (James Mason) to tea. They talk about the old days and watch some old home movies and a TV interview with the present-day royalty of Japur; and all the phantoms of Regal and Imperial India parade briefly, vividly, hauntingly across the screen.

The outstanding entry in the London Festival, finally, was *The Traveling Players (O Thiasos)* which confirms Theo Angelopoulos (director of *Reconstruction* and *Days of '36*) as a major talent. It is a panorama of Greek history from 1936 and the Metaxas dictatorship to 1952 and American domination of Greek politics, as reflected in the odyssey of a little troupe of actors who tour with a sentimental nineteenth-century melodrama, a village *Romeo and Juliet*, called *Golfo the Shepherdess*. They never get to finish the play, and the tranquil sheep painted on their backcloth gaze down upon generations of anguish and bloodshed. At another level, these sad, shabby, often hungry folk act out the Atrides myth.

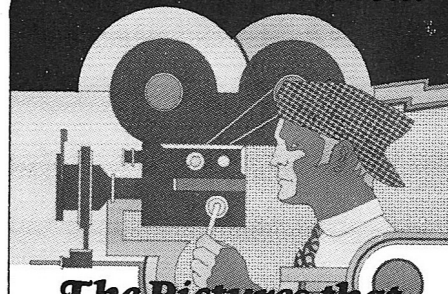
For Greeks the most remarkable breakthrough signaled by the film was that here, for the first time, the struggles of the outlawed Communist resistance are discussed openly on the screen (Communism was only legalized, after four decades, within the past year). Ironically, the authorities would not agree to let the film go as the official entry to Cannes, where, without doubt, it would have been the strongest contender for the Grand Prix.

Epic in scale, the film is also epic in the Brechtian sense in its treatment. The action is seen as a series of individual, often inexplicable events or tableaux, commented by monologues, by slogans written on the walls, or by songs. The passage of history reverberates in individual incidents or is summarized in symbols: a straying hen provides a metaphor for the disastrous famine of the early 1940s.

Angelopoulos's style of a roaming, exploratory camera and lengthy shots (there are only eighty individual shots in the whole film) inevitably recalls Jancsó; though he is now a totally individual stylist in his own right. *The Traveling Players* is a film which unfolds its secrets and its meanings gradually, together with its suspense, so that at the end of its four hours you are left eager to be told more. There were few enough films of half the length, in London or Paris, of which this much could be said.

Film critic for *The Times* (London), David Robinson is author of *Hollywood in the Twenties*.

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## FOCUS on Education

Many people know Wisconsin only as rumor, a whispered land of cheese which is situated somewhere north of Chicago. That may be why the city of Madison exists almost as a well-kept secret, an obscure film mecca in the heartland. It has a vibrant film community, with a choice of one dozen films showing on a good campus night, ranging perhaps from Ozu to Murnau to Ford; it has *The Velvet Light Trap*, a respected journal of film history and criticism which is published there; and it has been the home base for many young writers—Joseph McBride (who has written excellent studies of directors Howard Hawks, Orson Welles, and John Ford) and Russell Campbell (editor of a substantial British series of books on cinema practicum).

The city is also the little-known home of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research; a library and motion picture archives that, with the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Eastman House in Rochester, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the UCLA archives in Southern California, shelters one of the most comprehensive and exciting collections of film materials available to U.S. researchers.

"This is a terrific place," declared Susan Dalton, film archivist for the center, as she talked in her small office near the heart of the University of Wisconsin campus. "Between the Communication Arts Department, the Memorial Library, the State Historical Society, and the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, the opportunities for people interested in television, theater, and film are tremendous—plus we have all the resources of a major university."

The center, which is jointly sponsored by the University of Wisconsin and the State Historical Society, is located in the State Historical Society building, an imposing edifice near Lake Mendota. The building also contains a major library, the state archives, and hundreds of pictorial and manuscript collections; but its importance to film scholars and buffs is in the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater

Research, quietly founded almost fifteen years ago. Since its inception, a committed and resourceful staff has managed to collect approximately 1,750 Hollywood feature films; thousands of TV programs, documentaries, short subjects and cartoons; scripts, oral histories, pressbooks, stills, contracts, correspondence; and the personal papers of nearly 160 theater, television, and film luminaries.

The gem of the center's collections is the valuable United Artists donation, a prestigious gift negotiated by the Wisconsin Center in 1969. The gift (which came with a United Artists cash grant for the immense task of collating the material) includes the corporate records of the first phase of development of the United Artists Corporation, 1919-50; the Warner Bros. film library, 1913-50, including production and legal files, 50 silent features, 800 sound features, 1,500 short subjects, 300 cartoons, 19,000 still negatives, 950 pressbooks, and voluminous scripts, contracts, and correspondence; the RKO Pictures film library, 1929-54, including 700 sound features; the Monogram film library, 1931-46, including 200 sound features, 6,000 still negatives, and 80 pressbooks; the Ziv Television Library, 1948-62, including 2,000 episodes from 38 television series, 2,000 shooting scripts, and 38,000 still negatives; and 200 Popeye cartoons; plus over 100,000 additional Hollywood stills.

How did the Wisconsin Center become such a prime repository so quickly? Susan Dalton smiled. "We have been at it since 1960," she said, "quietly going about our business, collecting in this area. The United Artists collection didn't make us a repository of national importance; we already had more than a

hundred collections. I can't understand why more people don't know we are here. You'd think the word would have spread." She continued, "Our general collecting policy is that we'll take whatever we can get which we feel will be of interest to researchers or historians. We're happy that the materials are in an archive, rather than rotting away in a basement. We do have a strong field program, and we're collecting all the time."

The center is always humming with activity—over 150 researchers watched nearly 2,000 showings of films during the last year, Dalton estimated. Prior to the acceptance of the United Artists collection, the viewing facilities at the Wisconsin Center were minimal; today there are four Steenbeck editor-viewers: two 16mm two-plates, a 16mm six-plate editing machine, and a 35mm four-plate. The archival prints are seen by university classes (and, in the case of the RKO list, regularly on the local educational television station). Researchers travel from all over the country and the world, to view rare prints at the archives; the number includes the occasional luminary, like director John Cromwell (who recently visited the center to work on his autobiography). However, most of the researchers are students working on theses, articles, and dissertations.

Though the prints are largely in mint condition, most of the negatives are stored in the Library of Congress; the Wisconsin Center does not function as a stock footage library—in fact, only movie stills are (inexpensively) copied. And much of the material, from the films and personal or corporate papers, is restricted in various ways from commercial publication.

"You have to be working on a research project," explained Dalton, listing the center's general rules for access. "We're not a film education association, we're not here for the students to watch a lot of movies. It's actually open for anybody who talks a good game and looks serious. But it's a research-oriented institution for people working on specific projects, who

*Continued on page 80*



a dentist in Arkansas. Wayne and Stewart mean to free him, but before they can make their move Stewart gets kicked in the head by a stallion he is trying to break. He dies before Wayne can quite manage to give voice to the affection he feels for him, and while also thinking that he has been responsible for the death of his surrogate-son, the young wrangler. The widow is left with Wayne, the one man of the three whom she can't stand, and the young whore (Cybill) accompanies Fonda back to Arkansas, to keep him company while he waits for the noose. Whoring, she reasons, is not apt to be any harder a life in Arkansas than it is along the Texas border.

"Palo Duro" was to date the only film script I thoroughly enjoyed writing. This, I suspect, was because I was able to steal a favorite theme from my own second novel (*Leaving Cheyenne*): the *Jules and Jim* theme of the lifelong triangular courtship. To have repeated this theme in another novel would have been, after all, repetitious, but to work it into a movie about the nineteenth-century West was legitimate sport. The tone was to be tragicomic: A great deal of funny bickering and misadventure turning finally tragic, ameliorated only by the sense that the affection, or call it love, which the three men felt for one another had survived to the end, though none of them ever have the sense that they have communicated it adequately.

Studio response to the script was enthusiastic. Despite the fact it dealt with a subject that has never been popular—old age—it nevertheless had many winning qualities. The major and minor roles were rich, most of it was funny, and yet there was pa-

thos enough to bring a tear to the eye of, say, Frank Yablans. For lovers of the Western it would have been pure honey, for it would have allowed Peter to use the images and the traditions that the three principals had established for themselves in many fine Westerns.

That is, done properly, the film would have had a kind of built-in mythic resonance. I could hardly wait for it to be shot, so I could see it, but it now appears that this is a pleasure I am unlikely to have. The reasons, in this case, are not the usual reasons of studio indifference or lack of money—the project was developed at a time when Peter seemed to have permanent lease on the golden touch. The film didn't get made because the actors hated the script—or if hate is too strong a word it is certainly fair to say that they received it with ambivalence and suspicion.

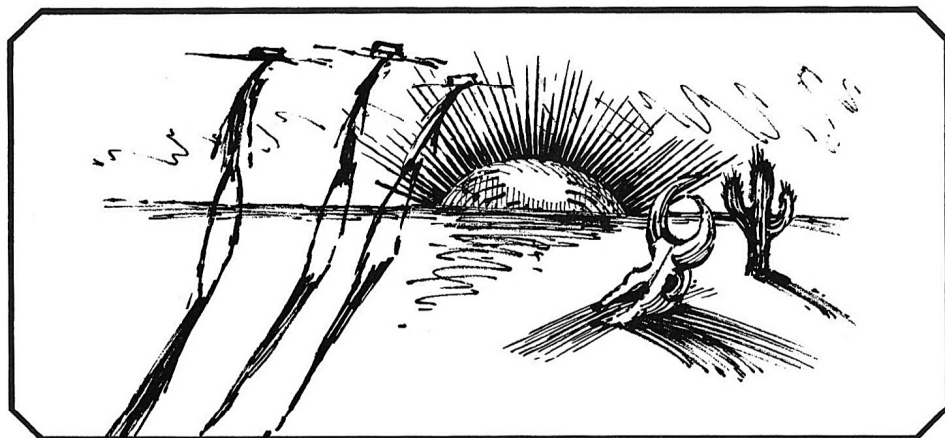
Their reactions caught me—and, I think, to a lesser extent, Peter—off guard. These men were not, after all, kids; they were three of the most seasoned actors in the world; and yet, their reading of the script seemed to me not such much professional as menopausal. A) They didn't want to be old men. They might, eventually and individually, have to be old men in real life, but that this must also be true of their screen life they in no way accepted. As far as their screen life went, the most which was inevitable was that they should have to be middle-aged, and that was bad enough. B) They didn't want the Old West to end. Again, the fact that it had actually ended around the turn of this century did not mean they need lend themselves to a dramatization of this distasteful fact. In their movies, if they chose it, the clock could be

stopped in 1870. And, C) if they must be old, and if the Old West must end, it should be in a blaze of glory, with the three of them crossing the Great Divide triumphantly, at the head of a wagon train of players. It should not end by all odds in a dusty town on the border, with one of them arrested for shooting a dentist and another kicked in the head by a horse. No such realistic denouement would do.

Also, I think, the three men rightly saw what we ourselves had not been conscious of in doing the script: that it was an attempt at a culmination, the wrapping up of a tradition. Had it succeeded it might have put a period to their careers, and the likelihood that it might have made a finer period than any of them is ultimately likely to get is not a consideration which could be expected to have much effect.

James Stewart and Henry Fonda eventually developed a kind of grudging interest in the script, and at least a tentative willingness to undertake it, though with many reservations. (One of the most amusing of these reservations was their difficulty in believing that the widow in question could have really been in love with one or both of them, instead of Wayne—a man she in fact dislikes.) Wayne's resistance, however, has so far been appropriately monolithic. He didn't think the funny parts were funny, he didn't like playing the heavy while Stewart played the poet, and, clinchingly, he didn't realize what affection his character would have prompted in an audience.

The script could, of course, have been made with other actors, but it was really written to the balance of these three actors, and no one as yet has worked up any enthusiasm for alternative casting. And the fact that it didn't get made when it was conceived raises interesting questions, indeed, about the balance and the sequence of careers. What would have happened to theirs, had they made it when it was written? What would have happened to Peter's, had he made it before, instead of, or after, *Paper Moon*? No one can say, of course, but neither can anyone with an interest in actors, directors, movies, or destiny, help wondering.



Larry McMurtry is a contributing editor to *American Film*.



## More Than Meets the Eye

### On William Wellman

Gerald Peary

In December 1975, William A. Wellman died of leukemia at age seventy-nine, leaving behind a wife, grown kids, grandchildren, golf clubs, airplanes, this puzzling autobiography<sup>1</sup> to ponder, and some eighty-odd films of his making to categorize, classify, and reevaluate to determine the ultimate worth of a long and dedicated career. Just how good a director, how important an artist, was "Wild Bill" Wellman? Nobody knows.

Actually, the last several years before his death had been particularly nice to Wellman. In 1972 the British Film Institute put together a retrospective "season" with twenty-six films of his direction, including such rare items as *You Never Know Women* (1926) and *Safe in Hell* (1931).

His most honored work, *Wings* (1928), recipient of the first Academy Award for Best Picture, had been restored in a luxurious 35mm print and played anew at first-run theaters. Some other Wellman movies, particularly from his prolific Warners period (sixteen films from 1930-34), also began to receive serious critical attention in the esoteric journals, from England's tiny *Brighton Review* (now defunct) to extended pieces on *Wild Boys of the Road* and *Heroes for Sale* in *The Velvet Light Trap*.

Alongside his films, Wellman himself achieved some personal recognition toward the end, as an articulate spokesman for an elder generation of Hollywood directors. He enjoyed the modest spotlight. Despite his self-image as "not a particularly lovable fellow," left over from his brawling "Wild Bill" early days, Wellman proved a kind and gentle solo guest on the "Tomorrow" show several years

ago, patiently fielding an hour's worth of fawning, fanzine questions from beetle-browed Tom Snyder. (The befuddled host had seen a grand total of one Wellman picture, *The High and the Mighty*, and insisted on playing its theme song before and after every commercial break.)

Of much more considerable interest was Wellman's appearance as featured artist on a segment of Public Television's "The Men Who Made the Movies." Richard Schickel's intense personal feeling for Wellman's career, evidenced in the beautifully chosen clips, made the evening a special occasion. Poetic aerial shots from Wellman's last film, the aborted autobiographical *Lafayette Escadrille*, with Bill Wellman, Jr., playing a World War I flyer father, faded to the then seventy-seven-year-old William A. Wellman seated in deep conversation with the offscreen Schickel.

Wellman was still an incredibly handsome man, with a full head of soft white curly hair, dark rimmed glasses and dark impressive eyes, a thin mustache, and a finely shaped, fiery nose, worthy of a movie star. He only acted in one film ever, a silent, but he might have been a matinee idol, with the virile, swashbuckler looks of an Errol Flynn. A look at early photographs shows Wellman to have been that comely.

## BOOKS

He thought differently. He hated putting on makeup. He loathed watching his image on the screen. He chose instead to become a screen director, perhaps Hollywood's closest correlative to flying over France. "There was no school for directors....," said Wellman, "just the know-how of the making of a picture, great desire, unending work, and the great privilege of having lived unusual and exciting lives."

From 1926 through 1958, Wellman toiled in Hollywood, becoming one of the most respected directors within the industry. Yet the critical red carpet treatment of Schickel's *The Men Who Made*

*the Movies*, where Wellman was linked with such pantheon luminaries as George Cukor, Raoul Walsh, and Vincente Minnelli, was a long time coming and almost not reached in Wellman's lifetime.

Back in the fifties, Manny Farber made a valiant attempt to create cultist interest in this career. In his seminal 1957 essay on "The Underground Film," Farber argued strongly for "...the masculine picturemaking that Hawks and Wellman exploited...a subterranean delight that looks like cheap penny candy." He warned that Wellman's most famous pictures, such as *The Story of GI Joe*, "the ones that have attained the almond-paste-flavored eminence of the Museum of Modern Art's film library," would disappoint a discerning viewer. (Farber strangely included the baroque *The Public Enemy* in this category, in lieu of *The Ox-Bow Incident* or *Battleground*.) Yet he insisted that Wellman's ostensibly minor pictures demand attention. "Both Hawks and Wellman...are like basketball's cornermen: Their best shooting is done from the deepest, worst angle."

The French critics wine and dined and homaged Hawks. *Scarface*, *Oui*. But *The Public Enemy*, *Non*. *Cahiers du Cinema* had nothing to say about Wellman's movies. The name of William A. Wellman is not even mentioned in *Godard on Godard*, a veritable telephone black book of Hollywood directors. Likewise, the *Movie* crowd in Britain found room for Nicholas Ray, Sam Fuller, Otto Preminger, but not Bill Wellman. Typically, his name is missing from the index of V. F. Perkins's *Film as Film*.

Back in the United States, Pauline Kael wrote briefly but favorably in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* of *Roxie Hart* and *Nothing Sacred*, and the latter was endorsed also by Richard Corliss, but more for the Ben Hecht screenplay. Other than a 1966 interview in the Los Angeles-based *Cinema*, Wellman biography was confined to stories in the Director's Guild house organ, *Action*. One of these articles was by his son, Bill Wellman, Jr.

On the critical side, Andrew Sarris perhaps did Wellman more damage than intended by assigning him in *The American Cinema* to that Dante's Inferno of categories, "Less Than Meets the Eye." Sarris dismissed Farber's call to examine Wellman's "B-movies" by saying that "with Wellman, crudity is too often mistaken for sincerity." Further, he concocted a not quite comprehensible combination of formalist and auteurist rhetoric to seal his argument: "Wellman...is a recessive director, one whose images tend to recede from the foreground to the background in the absence of a strong point of view.... With Wellman... objectivity is the last refuge of mediocrity."

Since the long-ago publication of *The*

<sup>1</sup>A *Short Time for Insanity* by William A. Wellman. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1974, 276 pp., illustrated, \$10.





William Wellman (seated) and cameraman Sid Hickox during filming of *Night Nurse*.

*American Cinema*, Sarris has upped his opinion of Wellman. In private conversation, he has explained a need of reevaluation and expressed a particular interest in the obscure *Robin Hood of El Dorado*. Perhaps in a revised edition of his classic book, Sarris will place Wellman in a newly created category of "More Than Meets the Eye."

In the meantime, film scholarship awaits the first major evaluation of Wellman's career. There have been several legendary attempts at books, supposedly abandoned because the worst of Wellman is absolutely unwatchable. (In truth, essays on such hack doggerel as *Love is a Racket* and *Central Airport*—1932 and 1933, respectively—would be hard to concoct, but probably no more than cinematic defenses of such Ford boobies as *Arrowsmith* and *Mary of Scotland*. There are clinkers in the most supreme careers.) What does exist for now is only this unorthodox, upside-down slice of autobiography, *A Short Time for Insanity*. The single book on Wellman is authored by the man himself.

This volume actually was composed a few years back, while Wellman lay in a hospital bed, recovering from a bout of acute fibrositis. With only an uncomfortably androgynous Christ, eyelashes like Mae West, to keep him company, he-man Wellman willingly drifted into reveries of his colorful lifetime and recorded them. But those wishing for an orderly, factual, sober autobiography had best avoid *A Short Time for Insanity*. Modernist "Wild Bill" Wellman was floating on

"green hornets" while penning this lunatic, disjointed, solipsistic work, a pastiche of "...codeined joys of the memory, little twitters of the past,...adult pain and laughter, sophomoric actions and reactions, a life of too many failures and an overabundance of rabbit-foot luck." That's how Wellman describes it.

Most of *A Short Time for Insanity* is utterly subjective and skippable. There are some duller-than-hell war stories, a page-and-a-half hospital report printed verbatim—"Enema successful but rugged, an angry experience"—and an interminable tale of directing Dwight David Eisenhower of similar tedium. Also, there are golf anecdotes and shaggy dog stories of Billy Wellman's boyhood pet, Taffy. But there is some terrific material here also. Wellman, a man who hated to read books, was capable of writing beautiful, compressed primitivist prose. "I am an 'it's a man,' not an 'it is a man' type of writer," he explained. "In other words, either my education has been limited or I'm (not I am) just an ornery old bastard. Take your pick, and you won't be wrong either way." This ornery person, when really on, could make like a Hammett, as with this description of his burnt-out childhood home:

It was black and gone, and the big homey living room below it was a hippopotamic shower. The piano was waterlogged. The huge, braided rug was soggy, soaked, and stinking. The room looked bony. I walked out of what was once a door, and she saw me.

Beyond the stylistic flourishes, beyond the personal memories, *A Short Time for Insanity* is decidedly sketchy and disappointing on Wellman's filmmaking. Researchers would do better to read the long oral history in the printed version of Schickel's *The Men Who Made the Movies*. But the most revealing sections of Wellman's book—for grasping his most ambiguous films—are those dealing with the director's politics.

Wellman states, "I am a Republican sometimes and a Democrat others...I abhor extreme rightists and leftists." But the closer one reads, the more obvious is it that Wellman leaned toward Republican conservatism most of the time. He liked Ike and stood up at a Democratic Party dinner and attacked Harry Truman. "If I had...the power to select the man...for the presidency of the United States for whom I would vote, it would be Douglas MacArthur," he declared. Then Wellman and his wife walked out.

Yet Wellman was one who found himself mysteriously drawn to the Kennedys—not only to Jack but to Bobby. And not only RFK, but his progressive appeals. "When he went, a whole legion of

youth disappeared with him. They were making a few mistakes, but they weren't standing still."

*They weren't standing still.* These are the key words to understanding Wellman's sympathies and Wellman's heroes, cutting across class lines and ideologies. Sarris was wrong: Bill Wellman was hardly an "objective" director. He took sides always with those moving forward—vagabonds, drifters, the men flying through the air, tramps with trains to catch, infantrymen crossing the vast and alien European terrain. Beginning with his lost hobo picture, *Beggars of Life* (1928), Wellman made movies about the camaraderie and communality of those walking the road of life, bound for death or glory.

Most often, he celebrated the military man, tracking into the battleground. But Wellman's sympathies went beyond uniformed jingoism. He loved the anarchist children of *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933), hopping trains, battling the police and the inequities of the Depression. He cared deeply for the legion of rugged females crossing America in *Westward the Women* (1951) to California opportunity, but leaving their dead scattered along the way. The elegiac calling out of the names of the deceased at the end of the journey is one of the few tributes to female heroism in the history of American movies.

The opposite of the road to freedom is confinement, death in life. For fiercely anti-Communist Wellman, it was the paranoid horror of *The Iron Curtain*, an anti-Soviet attack against our ex-allies already in 1948. There are more subtle manifestations: James Cagney's Tom Powers in *The Public Enemy*, admired by Wellman for his dynamism despite a propensity to murder, is stopped in his tracks. Worse than being shot down and killed, Powers is wrapped up tight, mummified, the most devastating ending of all in Wellman's world view.

**O**ne more example: Norman Maine (Fredric March) takes his honeymoon in a camper in *A Star Is Born* (1937), a sublime highway celebration for the peripatetic Wellman hero. But Maine's life turns stagnant and immobile. When he *no longer is going anywhere* in life, Maine regains his dignity as he *walks* into the sea. Wellman showed a close-up of his footsteps and feet in the sand.

Despite his patriotism, Wellman found America less than a libertarian's dream, as confining at times as Norman Maine's Hollywood. As a result, Wellman emerges as one of those strange conservatives whose pictures reveal America's



contradictions, whose political obsessions, like Ford and Fuller, are uniquely interesting to leftists. *The Next Voice You Hear* (1951) for example, is a cretinous religious allegory about God coming to save the world. But it is also an uncanny dramatization of worker alienation, featuring a protagonist who hates his job, his foreman, his wife, his life, and can't understand why. The claustrophobia and misery are unbearable, a bit akin to *Woman Under the Influence*. The solution? It could just as well be Marxism as monotheism.

"Wild Bill" Wellman wanted to be free, just like everybody else. Without knowing it, he sided with Wilhelm Reich and Makavejev—freedom means sexual emancipation. The most common scene in an early Wellman movie is that of a beautiful woman taking off her stockings, all the celebration of the body allowed in the pre-X era. His most touching physical moment comes from *Wings*, when a shivering Buddy Rogers kisses his dying buddy, Richard Arlen, on the mouth. "How the hell do you say I love a man?" Wellman asks in his book. He answered on the screen.

William A. Wellman found freedom for himself, first in a superb forty-year marriage to Dorothy Coonan, the freckle-faced, "Leave It to Beaver" rowdy from *Wild Boys of the Road*; second, in making movies; and third, in flying so high in the air "where it's peaceful and lonesome, just you, not even God; he is too busy below."

In François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*, the freedom-obsessed Catherine (Jeanne Moreau) "asked that her ashes be cast to the wind, but they wouldn't allow it." At the end of *A Short Time for Insanity*, Bill Wellman made a similar request: "I want to be cremated and emptied high above the smog—high enough to join a beautiful cloud—not one that brings a storm, one that brings peace and contentment and beauty."

Happily, Wellman's request was heeded. His son, William, Jr., announced that the ashes would be scattered from a plane. At the same time, he told the press that his father had used his final illness to complete a second volume of memoirs, *Growing Old Disgracefully*.

The conclusion is self-evident: The world has not heard the last of the late and distinguished William A. Wellman, either as a writer or as a director whose reputation only can move forward. "I'll die, but I will be around for a long time," wrote Wellman, and he's (not he is) right.

Gerald Peary, contributing editor for *Film Heritage* and *The Velvet Light Trap*, is a lecturer in the English Department of Livingston College, Rutgers University.

## The Other Nixon

## On Soap Opera Addiction

### Jeanine Basinger

**A**ll *Her Children*<sup>1</sup> by Dan Wakefield is the book which asks the question: Can a sophisticated male writer find peace and happiness as the champion of one of New York's most successful soap operas? The answer is an overwhelming "Yes!" as Wakefield chronicles his day-by-day involvement with the cast, writers, and technicians of the daytime TV drama "All My Children."

Wakefield is, by his own admission, a closet soap opera addict. In *All Her Children* he comes out of the closet and points an accusing finger at those who denigrate the "soaps." It's not the first time someone has made a sudden shift from secrecy to militancy, but few do so with Wakefield's grace and humor. In writing *All Her Children*, Wakefield admits he became deeply involved with the entire staff of the show, in particular with Agnes Nixon, writer and creator of several top daytime dramas.

**I**n style, *All Her Children* is not unlike its subject matter. It rambles along, full of cozy chats, stopping here for a cup of coffee and there for a glass of iced tea, while the principals involved talk over the day's events and air their feelings to one another. It's full of these shared conversations, plus character developments, low-key moments and high drama, and down-to-earth common sense coupled with baroque sentiment. Its main events include a real-life wedding and a touching scene played in a little church (the same little church once used for an important

<sup>1</sup>*All Her Children* by Dan Wakefield. New York: Doubleday, 192 pp., illustrated, \$6.95.



Agnes Nixon, creator and chief writer of "All My Children."

scene in "All My Children") between the author and Agnes Nixon.

Wakefield is at his best when describing the problems of writing a soap opera, keeping it moving from day-to-day while still providing a steady dose of "backing" for those who tuned in late or missed an episode. He amusingly outlines the problems created when an actor wants to leave a show, a not infrequent situation since soap operas run for years with the same cast of characters. The writer can send the defector on a round-the-world cruise, kill him off suddenly in a car accident, kill him off slowly with a lingering illness, or, as in one famous case, simply send him upstairs to polish his skis and let him never be heard from again. Other problems with actors, such as a request for a few days off for a honeymoon, can be dealt with more easily. Instead of a round-the-world cruise, the bridegroom is packed off "to Seattle," which Wakefield describes as the sort of respectable city a soap opera character would visit (Los Angeles being too freaky and San Francisco too cosmopolitan).



Wakefield includes a chapter each on the two big names in soap opera, writers Irna Phillips, a great-grandmother of daytime drama, and Agnes Nixon, her heir-apparent. Phillips and Nixon both might make excellent characters in their own stories, with Phillips being played by Bette Davis and Nixon by Olivia de Havilland. Where Phillips would tear an actor to shreds if she didn't like his performance, Nixon shrinks shyly away from such unpleasantness and enjoys the warmest of relationships with cast members. Where Phillips never married and seemed unable to reconcile her career with her private life, Nixon has found success as well as marital happiness. When Phillips died, Nixon learned of it by telephoning to wish her a Merry Christmas. The maid politely informed Nixon (a close friend) that Phillips was dead, but hadn't wanted anyone to know....It might spoil the holidays.

An interesting, but unsatisfying chapter tells of the typical soap opera actor's dilemma of being constantly recognized, not as himself, but as the character he plays. This confusion apparently often causes actors to slip into their characters in private life or to make observations more suited to the personality of their character than themselves. Furthermore, real-life drama has an eerie way of paralleling the story line, as when two actors who meet and fall in love in the story do the same in real life. Or when a character has a face lift, and the actress does the same. Or when a little boy who plays a sick child falls ill himself. It would take Ingmar Bergman to do identifications like this justice, and Wakefield provides no real analysis, a fault the serious reader may find with the book generally.

**W**akefield's points about soap operas are all intelligent, but they are not well developed. The basic issue he touches on—the differences between mass culture and elite culture, and where one turns into the other—is a complicated intellectual question that he does little more than introduce. Anyone who has dealt with the study of American film is familiar with the problems of making academically respectable a subject which many people feel has no place in the sacred

groves. Perhaps it is fair to say that television soap operas have assumed the burden of scorn once reserved for Hollywood. The soaps grind out their product on a weekly, businesslike schedule not unlike that once maintained by the studio system.

And the leading characters are adored by fans like the stars of old, with the notable exception that they are adored as their character, not as themselves. (A case might be made for the fact that the former stars were adored as a "character" and not as they really were. Yet when stars from the golden age were recognized it was "Hey, Hedy!" or "Hi, Lana!" and not "Nurse Ruth Martin" and "Grandma Kate." And when a Hollywood star played a character who had a baby, she did not receive hundreds of booties from the masses. She had to produce for herself to earn such treasures.) There is apparently a behind-the-scenes soap opera social life and celebrations take place on the set for weddings, birthdays, and special occasions just like in the old Hollywood. Special magazines devoted to daytime television drama exist, as well as soap opera fan clubs, fan mail, and newsletters.

The issue of the scorn heaped upon daytime drama—despite its enormous popularity—is central to Wakefield's book. He points out that there are now fourteen soaps on the air, each one watched daily by an alleged twenty million viewers. Why should these people apologize for watching relatively adult stories dealing with issues such as abortion, drug addiction, child abuse, racial prejudice, death, and taxes? Since much of nighttime television is notoriously more simpleminded and false, and is rarely presented with as much narrative skill and development, why, indeed? It is a question which goes largely unanswered, although Wakefield makes an interesting case for why soaps are so popular. Since people today are more rootless, homeless, and lost than ever before, they possibly turn to soaps to find a family, a continuing, stable situation in a fixed setting with a known set of characters. The soaps provide a surrogate family for the modern, isolated individual.

Wakefield tries to build a case for the "respectability" of soaps—university classes which use the dramas as sociology, history, or narrative; hordes of fans on college campuses who represent an

educated audience; group therapy sessions which use the soaps as a takeoff point for discussions. Wakefield calls up the ghosts of Dickens and Conrad (both of whose works originally appeared in serialized form in popular media), suggesting the soaps may be today's versions of those classic storytellers. (If so, future scholars are in trouble. The tapes of daytime dramas are destroyed. No records of "the most popular stories of our time" will exist to be studied....another parallel to Hollywood's past.)

**I**n fairness to Wakefield, he has set out to write an amusing book, an entertaining book, even a loving book, not an academic treatise. On those terms, he has succeeded. The book is a warm tribute to a group of people he met and liked first in a TV story, and whom he liked even better when he met them in real life. For solid information on the development of a soap opera, on the history of the genre, and an inside look at a typical example, *All Her Children* is good reading. It avoids an "aw-shucks" attitude, and, despite an unabashed affection for its subject, it doesn't make the reader feel like whipping up a batch of fudge either. Rather, it whets the appetite for a more serious study of soap operas, their mass appeal, and their reflections of our times.

Can little Soap Opera, the story from the wrong side of the tracks, finally be accepted when she moves into the academic community and asks the American Studies Department to let her sit beside Holly Wood in class? Will a soap opera addict ever be elected president of the United States? Can we all admit, finally, that daytime drama is well-acted, well-written, and satisfying to watch? Most important of all, and this includes Wakefield's loving and enjoyable book, can anybody ever write about soap opera without resorting to apology, joking asides, and an underlying sense of embarrassment?

Tune in for the next book....

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Jeanine Basinger teaches film in the Art Department of Wesleyan University and is the author of *Shirley Temple* and a forthcoming book, *Gene Kelly*.



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## Antonio Chemasi

### Look, Jane, Look!

At a film festival retrospective, Ruthe Stein watched Jane Fonda watching herself as "the ultimate sexpot in such forgettable flicks as *Tall Story*, *The Chapman Report*, *Sunday in New York*, and *The Game is Over*." When the two-hour compilation was over, Jane Fonda—now "a mature woman who knows what she is about"—faced the audience and said: "I guess we've changed a lot—you and me. The difference is I have to keep having my nose rubbed in it."

"Fonda: Back to Acting" by Ruthe Stein. *Audience*, January 1976.

### Limelight Revisited

Returning to Charles Chaplin's *Limelight* after more than twenty years, Douglas McVay finds it has the unmistakable look of a classic—it may even be Chaplin's greatest film. Defects are present—in a trite montage sequence, in the obvious doubling in the ballet scenes. Otherwise, skillfully avoiding the "risks of self-indulgent schmaltz," Chaplin movingly re-

lates the story of an aging theatrical entertainer loved by a young dancer. Claire Bloom's performance "is the more incandescent," but Chaplin's "comes nearer to total perfection." McVay concludes that *Limelight* "would have been, and should have been, the proper, ideal swan song and farewell for Chaplin in the cinema." The film, made in 1952, "has an autumnal wisdom about it, the air of a considered testament, in its preoccupation with youth, age, and imminent mortality."

"Chaplin's Immortal Story: *Limelight* Revisited" by Douglas McVay. *Movietone News*, 14 December 1975.

### Secrets of Women

Lee Grant, who starred briefly in the ill-fated NBC series, "Fay," during an interview on recent changes in women's lives: "Years ago, in my first marriage, if women got together, it would be to gossip about our husbands—that's what we thought we had in common. Now, when I have dinner with friends—Lily Tomlin, Goldie Hawn, Julia Phillips—we show each other scripts, discuss new projects, share our professional experiences. As more of us are moving into producing and directing, the level of creativity among women has become very high, and therefore our relationships have changed—have themselves become more creative. We have yet to see those new kinds of relationships among women reflected on television or in films."

"Art Catches Up to Life" by Lee Grant. *Ms.*, November 1975.

### Richard the Fast

Richard Lester's speed as a director is legendary—so is his iconoclasm. On location in Spain for *Robin and Marian* with Audrey Hepburn and Sean Connery, Lester as usual was ahead of schedule. He used three cameras and operated one of them himself. Why multiple cameras? "If an actor does something good, then you don't have to do it over." Lester's refreshingly blunt about the camera: "I know there's a myth about the magic of change in the transition from film to screen. That's nonsense. What you see is what you photograph." Lester, who never examines daily rushes, works so fast that "he managed to film *The Three Musketeers* without the stars' knowing that they were concurrently shooting a

sequel." For postproduction he allows only seven weeks. Careful planning? No. "I'm not meticulous about anything," he remarked. "I don't like my films to be neat, as some other directors do." He has no idea how his style evolved, though TV work is an obvious influence. Between pictures, Lester returns to TV commercials. "There are a lot of innovations to be found in commercials. I am learning all the time."

"Richard Lester: *Robin and Marian*" by Bob Thomas. *Action*, November-December 1975.

### Moving the Image

"When a director dies," John Grierson once warned, "he becomes a photographer." But a still photographer, James Monaco argues, can grow into a director, and he cites examples: Jerry Schatzberg, once a fashion photographer, whose sharply composed *Panic in Needle Park* is filled with "violent portraits and moody location shots"; Howard Zieff, once with *McCall's* and *Esquire*, who shows subtle visual wit in *Slither* and *Hearts of the West*; Dick Richards, once of *Life* and *Vogue*, with his highly stylized *Farewell, My Lovely*; Gordon Parks, once with *Life*, whose films (*Shaft*, *Supercops*) helped "to establish the gritty New York style of urban cinematography" of the seventies. Monaco saves his strongest praise for a former photographer for *Look*, Stanley Kubrick. He cites the "abstract symmetries" of *2001* and the "Diane Arbus interiors" of *A Clockwork Orange* to show that although Kubrick "is far removed from his early training with the still camera, his work still bears the marks of it." Especially *Barry Lyndon*: "If art had existed two hundred years ago, these are the images photographers of the 1780s would have produced."

"Why Still Photographers Make Great Directors" by James Monaco. *The Village Voice*, 22 December 1975.

### The Big Squeeze

"Don't Squeeze the Charmin" commercials may be among TV viewers' favorite irritations, but they're also a media phenomenon: one of the most successful, longest-running ad campaigns in any medium. They're also an example of the endearing lunacy of Madison Avenue. In a study which never misses a double entendre, Ron Rosenbaum traces the origins of Charmin's campaign to topple the dominance of Scott tissues. (Two ver-



sions exist of the fateful moment the slogan was born. The more colorful is that a roomful of ad men were throwing a Charmin roll about during a moment of creative exhaustion until someone warned, "Don't squeeze it." And so it began.) The abrasive commercials, instantly despised, were also instantly successful, heavily damaging Scott's lead. Hard sell has since regained some respect. "It's Not Creative Unless It Sells," chortled Charmin's advertisers in a trade publication. Meanwhile, Rosenbaum sees signs that after a decade Mr. Whipple, the Charmin spokesman, may be eased off stage center. The new spots have him saying less and less, and—further indignity—in one commercial he urges the ladies to squeeze the Charmin.

"The Great Toilet Paper War" by Ron Rosenbaum. (MORE), December 1975.

## The Tube Boobs

*True* magazine, one of the last refuges of the macho ideal, examined the treatment of men in daytime soap opera and recoiled in shocked indignity. *True* complained that shows like "Another World" portrayed men "as gutless and/or villainous boobs." Moreover, it found that most male characters on daytime serials suffer from something and listed the embarrassments that are visited on the stronger sex: "sterility, stupidity, amnesia, alcoholism, impotence, night sweats, acne, acrophobia, senility, insecurity, and outright lunacy." An editor of a soap opera newsletter told *True* that some actors have quit in protest at the "shambling fools" their characters were reduced to. Worse, some even found their characters so emasculated that their off-screen sex life was affected. *True* believes the stereotypes are slowly changing. "But there is still a long way to go before the men of Soapland are at least vaguely recognizable as the same types who read this magazine."

"Gutless in Soapland" by Dick Adler. *True*, October 1975.

## Heart vs. the Machine

Jean Renoir interviewed at eighty on his Hollywood years: "Hollywood was more organized than what I was used to, but not a great deal. It was not the film-making system itself that was bad, anyway. In my opinion, it was the whole machine. What was wrong was that the aim of an industry is to make money....I believe in spontaneity, in the personality

of the artist; not the final product, but the heart of the artist. Perfection comes before money, at least I always thought so. I feel that the studios were ruined looking for the impossible perfection of the perfect money-making machine."

"Renoir at 80" by Scott Eyman. *Focus on Film*, Autumn 1975.

## Dead-end Genius

Susan Sontag on charges that Ingmar Bergman is antifeminist and technically old-fashioned: "I wouldn't call Bergman old-fashioned. But, despite some brilliant narrative inventions in his two best films, *The Silence* and *Persona*, his work doesn't suggest any fruitful development. He is an obsessional artist, the worst kind to imitate. Like Stein and Bacon and Jancso, Bergman is one of those oppressively memorable geniuses of the artistic dead-end, who go very far with a limited material—refining it when they are inspired, repeating it and parodying themselves when they aren't."

"An Interview with Susan Sontag." *Salmagundi*, Fall 1975-Winter 1976.

## Rabbit Redivivus

Remember when happiness once was a Bugs Bunny cartoon before the feature? Ray Bradbury remembers, and he wonders why the studios don't. For a small fraction of the profits rolling into Hollywood these days, the cartoon units of the major studios could be reopened, Bradbury argues, and "Walter Lantz rehired, Chuck Jones reinstated, John and Faith Hubley given more to do, Magoo slapped back to life, and Hanna-Barbera perhaps induced to do more than Saturday morning minimal-animation...." From a brush with Salvador Dali, Disney went on to make *Fantasia*, Bradbury notes. "Let's send John and Faith Hubley to work with Chagall, Norman McLaren to devise a ten-minute abstract exercise with Vasarely, Chuck Jones to live in and with and bring back the winter world of Wyeth, or even, God save us all, the lost pirate world of Wyeth's father." And Bradbury himself, an unashamed lover of animation, places his own "Situation Wanted" ad: "Put me in charge of a seven-minute animated film on the witch skies of Goya's Spain, filled with flying brooms, hags, beasts, smokes, and the fiery cloud of war."

"As Norman Corwin Once Said: Not So Wild a Dream" by Ray Bradbury. *The Hollywood Reporter*, 17 December 1975.

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need our materials." She sighed, as a telephone rang behind her, and a flurry of people entered, asking to see this filed-away script or that film. "We're really running at peak capacity right now," she added. "We're always somewhat behind in processing. We're definitely going to have to expand in the future."

The other strength of the Wisconsin Center archives is its burgeoning list of personal papers, including the memorabilia of seven members of "The Hollywood Ten"; films, outtakes, correspondence, and miscellaneous papers of noted documentarist Emile de Antonio; the records of the Federal Theater Project; and items from individuals as diverse as Dore Schary, Fredric March, Walter Mirisch, Shirley Clarke, and Kirk Douglas. The Douglas collection includes private papers of the actor and of his motion picture company, Bryna Company, a hundred boxes of "correspondence, contracts, financial papers, photographs, and scripts for several of his films produced in the 1950s, among them *Ulysses*, *Lust for Life*, *Lizzie*, *Paths of Glory*, *The Vikings*, and *Spartacus*."

Tino Balio, the director of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, makes at least one annual cross-country trip on behalf of the University of Wisconsin, bent on persuading potential donors that the Madison archives are the best, most energetic, and scholarly depository for their private papers.

The funds to operate the Wisconsin Center come from the State of Wisconsin, but the money is never enough for the visionary plans of the staff—plans which include both the physical expansion and the acquisition of additional equipment. "I don't think any archives in the country can say they get enough money; we certainly don't," said Dalton. "Our budget is restricted. There is only so much money to go around in Wisconsin; we do the best we can with what we have. We would, of course, welcome monetary donations from anybody willing to shower money on us." She continued, "Right now, we don't have a lot of grants in the fire. We haven't been as active seeking grants as we have in the past. Obviously, we will have to be more so."

Dalton glanced on her desk at a calendar, pausing as if to calculate the increased labor, heartache, and expense that might accrue from the attention of a magazine article. Then, thinking ahead, she remarked, "People traveling here from out of state or out of town should make requests as far in advance as possible, because we do get to the point where we are booked solid for weeks on end."

Patrick McGilligan writes for *The Boston Globe*.



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